THE SHORT STORY MAGAZINE

ARGOSY

MAY, 1960

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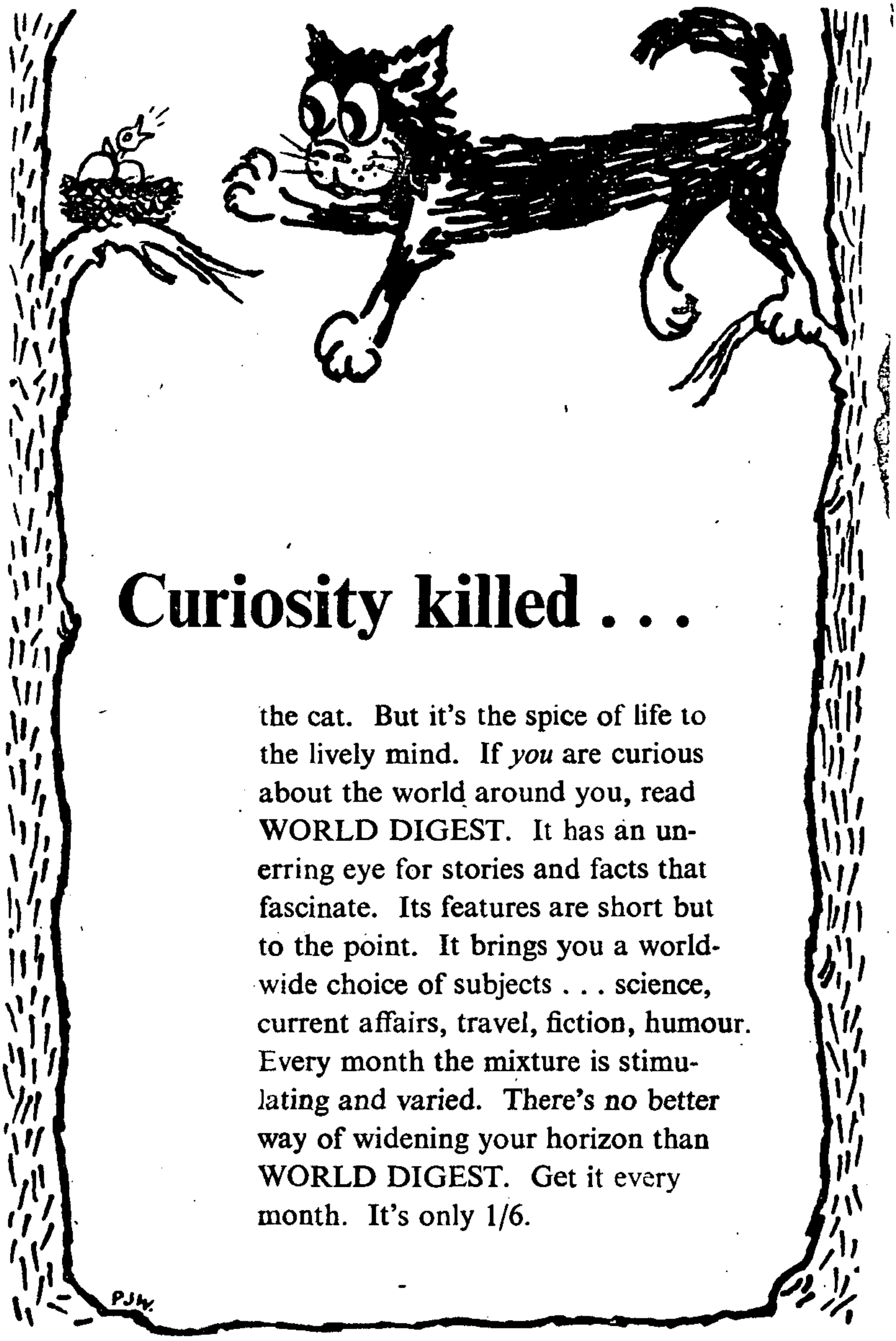

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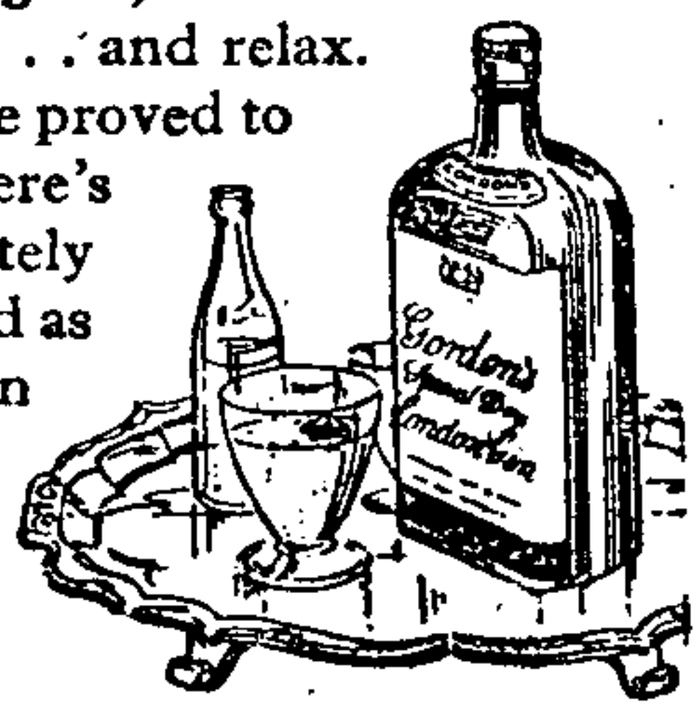

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ARGOSY

A Fleetway magazine

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Printed in England by PERCY BROTHERS LTD., THE HOTSPUR PRESS, MANCHESTER, 1 and published on the 10th of each month by FLEETWAY PUBLICATIONS LTD., Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Registered for Transmission by Canadian Magazine Post. Subscription Rates: Inland, £1 19s. for 12 months, 19s. 6d. for 6 months. Overseas (except Canada), £1 17s. for 12 months, 18s. 6d. for 6 months. Canada, £1 14s. 6d. for 12 months, 17s. 3d. for 6 months. Sole Agents: Australasia, Messrs. GORDON & GOTCH LTD.; South Africa, CENTRAL NEWS AGENCY LTD.; Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, Messrs. KINGSTONS LTD.
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The ARGOSY AWARD £500

THE ARGOSY AWARD of £500 goes to Edward McCarthy

His short story, *The Other Side of the Hill*, is on page 6. Edward McCarthy was born in 1933 in Ireland, educated at Cork University, worked for six months with the American Army in France, and then went as a teacher to the Sudan, where he still is. He is married to a Frenchwoman and has one son aged nine months. He started writing stories at sixteen, had a story published five years ago, but was so disappointed when he saw it in print that he stopped writing altogether until last year.

SPECIAL ARGOSY PRIZE £50

The Special Prize of £50 has been awarded to **James Leyland** whose story will appear next month.

SCHOOL PRIZES

£25 each to the winners, and £10 in books to their schools:

Anthony Dykstra, 16 yrs., Lycée Français de Londres
Roger Gourd, 16 yrs., St. Boniface's College, Plymouth
Carol James, 16 yrs., Walpole Grammar School, Ealing
Christine Jensen, 16 yrs., Oban High School
Celia Perkins, 17 yrs., Godolphin School, Salisbury
Jane Wollen, 16 yrs., Limuru Girls' School, Kenya

PANEL OF JUDGES

H. E. BATES

best-selling novelist and master of the short story form, whose own new collection, *An Aspidistra in Babylon*, came out recently, commented, " The mark of a good short story writer is to know what to leave out, and to make the tempo of words fit the theme. *The Other Side of the Hill* is a most poetic story; the words croon along and spin a web round you."

MARY STEWART

whose sixth novel, *My Brother Michael*, has won enthusiastic reviews, said, " *The Other Side of the Hill* is brilliantly done; no words wasted. This is writing with a real flair for prose."

JOHN BRAINE

whose *Room at the Top* was a fabulously successful novel and film, said, " I felt the atmosphere was genuine. Its one shining virtue is that all the people in it are genuine Irish peasants, not stage Irish—no over-abundance of begorras and blackthorns."

ENID LOVE

Head of School Broadcasts in Associated-Rediffusion, said of the School Prizes, " What an excellent thing it is that Argosy should be making this attempt to encourage young people to try their hand at writing. I have been most impressed by the variety and quality of the stories sent in." Of the Award winner, " Very well told. A fine sense of characterisation."

THE EDITOR

We received a record number of entries, many of high literary quality, and it has been exceptionally difficult to decide on the winner—more difficult than in any previous competition. Among the near-winners are a number of excellent stories which we hope to publish in future issues of Argosy.

We are in full accord with the decisions of the judges. Our grateful thanks go to them for the amount of time, trouble, and valuable constructive criticism they have set at our disposal.

THE OTHER SIDE

BY EDWARD McCARTHY

With this story Edward McCarthy,
a young Irishman, aged twenty-six,
wins The Argosy Award of £500.

THE cottage stood among some trees at the foot of a low hill. One side of the thatched roof was caving in where the last big storm had caught it, and the damaged part was covered with a piece of rough canvas that flapped in the wind with a cracking noise.

A concrete footpath, dark with hen-droppings, ran past the front of the cottage. A wooden gate that hung on one hinge opened on the muddy boreen that went past the cottage to the main road leading to the town, three miles down in the valley. On the other side of the boreen, hens picked on the manure-heap in front of the cowstalls, and a sheepdog lay sleeping in the hay in the hedge-enclosed haggard. The wind blew through the trees with a howling noise.

A pony and cart came slowly up the boreen. The cart creaked and swayed from side to side, the wheels made a squelching noise in the mud.

An old woman with a black shawl over her head held the reins in her yellow hands, and from time to time she made a clicking noise with her tongue. Her legs, which were yellow like her hands and covered with varicose veins, dangled over the side of the cart.

Beside her a small fat man sat, his sharp eyes moving from side

OF THE HILL

to side scanning the barren country, the wet fields in which the grass was so short that the earth showed through it. The man wore a dark suit ; with one hand he gripped the rim of his hat to keep it on. A black bag lay beside him in the cart.

They came in sight of the cottage, and the man leaned forward to look at it.

" A nice little place you have there, Mrs. Carney," he said.

" Wisha, I suppose you could find worse, Doctor," Bridie Carney said. She spoke with difficulty, for she had no teeth. " But 'tis a sad place it is this day, with himself stretched out on the flat of his back upon his bed."

They both shouted to make themselves heard above the wind.

Denny Carney came out of the haggard when he heard the cart. He was a big man of about forty, with very wide, red cheeks and big jaws. He stood at the gate of the haggard with his hands inside his belt and watched the doctor helping his mother down from the cart. His eyes were cold.

" How's your father, boy? " Bridie Carney asked, as she tied the pony to the gate.

Denny's lips did not move when he spoke. " Asleep, I suppose."

" Did you take him up the drink of water? "

" I did not." Denny gave the doctor a cold glance as he spoke.

" You're a queer son for any man to have, and he stretched out upon his bed."

Denny smiled. The corners of his mouth curled back, revealing a row of brown teeth with a gap at each side of his mouth.

" I been working," he said. " Someone has to do it."

" What a worker we have in you, God be praised." Mrs. Carney turned to the doctor who was staring up through the trees at the hill. " Let you be going inside, Doctor. 'Tis bitter cold out. This March wind is no good for God nor man."

She led the doctor into the house. When she took off her

shawl, her unkempt hair fell almost to her waist. She threw the shawl over the back of the wooden settle and pulled up a straw-seated chair to the turf fire.

She smiled at the doctor and said, " Let you be taking your ease and warming your hands at the fire whilst I climb up to the loft and wake up himself."

The doctor sat down. He watched her yellow face tighten with the effort she had to make to climb the stairs.

Denny came in. He stood at the open door and stared at the doctor with cold eyes.

The doctor said, " A great pity about your father, poor man."

" Aye."

" You were with him when it happened, your mother tells me."

" That I was."

" Did he get a bad fall in your own opinion? "

Denny smiled. " Not half bad enough for the old ruffian, if 'tis me own opinion you're wanting to have."

He turned and spat out of the door.

" What makes you say a thing like that, man? " the doctor asked in surprise.

Denny did not reply. He leaned against the wall and looked up at the low ceiling.

" Didn't you hear me, man? " The doctor's voice was sharp. " I said, ' What makes you say a thing like that about your own father? ' "

Denny laughed bitterly. He pulled up his sleeve and showed the doctor a dark red sore on his forearm. " That's me father's doing."

The doctor nodded his head. " I see."

Denny pulled down his sleeve. " 'Twas I was the happy man when the pony flung him off, I'm telling you. 'Twas an act of God, I reckon."

There was a shout upstairs. The doctor looked up in alarm. Denny grinned.

" He's after waking from sleep," he said.

There was another shout, and the doctor jumped to his feet.

Denny did not move. " Let you be going up to him," he said, grinning.

The doctor hesitated.

" He'll be glad out to meet you," Denny said with a smirk.

The doctor took up his bag and went up the stairs. Bridie Carney was standing on the landing at the top of the stairs. She was crying.

" Don't go in, Doctor," she sobbed. " There's a blind rage on him, and he swears he'll have your life if you touch him."

The doctor's face was pale. He looked past the woman into the room. He could see only a table with a pipe and matches and tobacco on it.

"Let me past," he whispered.

The woman looked at him with wild eyes. "I beseech you, Doctor," she cried, "don't go in while the madness is upon him. You don't know my husband: he'd knock the brains out of your skull with a blow of his blackthorn he keeps all the time in his bed by him."

The doctor drew her gently from the doorway and went into the room. It was a small room with the ceiling in the shape of an upturned V, and on two sides the walls were only three feet high. There was one small window that looked out on to the hill.

Long John Carney sat in the big iron bed with a bandage round his head. He was an enormous man with yellow buck teeth and glaring eyes. His exact age was unknown, but he himself claimed to be over eighty. He had a shock of white hair that was as soft as wool, and a thick white moustache that grew down over his mouth. His hands were big and brown and hard like leather.

"Keep back," he growled at the doctor.

The doctor stood inside the door and lit a cigarette. He watched Long John with his sharp eyes. Long John raised the blackthorn.

"Don't you come near me or 'twill be the end of you," he growled. "Keep back, I say."

The doctor blew a stream of smoke towards the ceiling.

"I hear you had a bad fall," he said casually.

Long John watched him with black glaring eyes. "If I had same, 'tis me own affair," he retorted.

"They tell me you struck your head upon a stone."

"There ain't no law in the land says a man can't strike his head upon a stone if he want to."

The doctor blew smoke at the ceiling.

"How old would you be now?" he asked casually.

"'Tis me own business how old or young I am. But I'll tell you this much: I'm a lot of winters older than you'll ever be."

"That's very likely," the doctor said. "Very likely indeed."

Long John gave him a suspicious look. He mistrusted anyone who agreed with him. A furtive look came into his eyes.

"I'll tell you how old I am," he said. "I'm exactly one year older than I was this time a year gone. He-he-he." He doubled up with laughter.

The doctor laughed, too. He took a step forward.

Long John saw the movement and raised the stick.

"Get back," he roared. "Get back afore I crack your skull with a blow."

The doctor smiled. "You're a hard man," he said, "with them would help you and aid you."

"I'm a hard man anyway," Long John said. "And what else would I be, and me whole life spent on top of a windy hill, and all them of me generation gone over the water? A rocky country begets hard men."

"*True for you,*" *murmured the doctor.*

"And scatters the weak ones like a handful of chaff flung in the wind," Long John continued, as if he had not heard. "All me life I've lived out in a land's fit for goats only and horny sheep."

"Aye," the doctor murmured. He took a step forward.

"I warn you," Long John said. His black eyes gleamed. "When your skull's split open, don't say I didn't give you fair warning."

The doctor drew on his cigarette and threw the butt out the window. The wind carried it away over the haggard.

"Truly, you're a hard man," he said. There was a suggestion of admiration in his voice.

"I made desolations in me time if you want to know. Aye, I was the ruination of many the strong man's in his grave this day."

"I believe you," the doctor said. He took a step forward without Long John noticing. He was within three feet of the bed. "Only the other night, down in the pub, I was hearing of some of your doings. They say you're hard as nails."

"That they do?" Long John was pleased. "They're not far out at that. I seen the dawn coming out of the east since me eyes would see."

"Is that so?" murmured the doctor.

"And would be after doing a good hour's work in the fields afore the cocks started crowing in the valley below. Not like that son of mine that's good only for wearing out the sheets, and that woman of mine that's all her days and nights whimpering and groaning like a dog after being kicked. There was a day when I could catch a rabbit running."

"There's few left could do the like this day," the doctor said. He moved nearer the bed.

"Was a day, too, when I'd down twenty pints of Guinness' porter and walk home under the moon—or maybe with no moon, with only the small stars for company—as stiff and straight as a young man marching up to the altar with his young white bride on his wedding-day."

"There isn't a man in the parish would do the same this day," the doctor said softly.

"Nor will be again, I'm thinking," Long John said.

"Nor will be again," the doctor murmured, "till time ends."

He was beside the bed now. Long John was staring past him, through the open window, at the trees with their naked branches grating against one another in the wind. The doctor sat down on the edge of the bed. He offered Long John a cigarette. The old man shook his head.

" I ever only smoked one of them things in me whole life," he said, " and I brought up me guts after."

The doctor lit a cigarette. " I smoked the pipe once myself," he said.

" That you did? "

" Aye. And I was as sick as a dog for two days after."

Long John smiled. The leathery skin of his face cracked into a thousand wrinkles.

" Me pipe's me best friend in this world," he said. " If I couldn't have it by me at all times, I'm thinking 'tis in the ground I'd liefer be. I heard of men who went to prison and their wits turned on 'em for want of a smoke. 'Twould have been me own case surely."

" I heard the same," the doctor said. He leaned forward and looked at the bandage round Long John's head. " You must have a great gash under that bandage," he said.

" 'Tis a mighty wound," Long John said.

" It must be surely."

" Half the side of me head's cut open so you could see me brain."

" You're codding me," the doctor said.

" I amn't."

" I'd like to see it, this great wound of yours," the doctor said softly. " I never seen a man's brains and he living."

" There's a length of bandages Bridie wound round me head, and the divil himself wouldn't loosen 'em."

" I'm thinking I might now," the doctor whispered.

" Them hands of yours look as weak as water."

" Let them be having a try, anyway."

" They're as white as the snow, them hands of yours, when it do be lying on that hill up there."

" Aye. They're white."

Long John laughed. " 'Tis easy seen you never drove a plough in a windy field with a frost would freeze the bladder inside you."

" I never did. Keep that head of yours steady like a man."

The doctor slowly undid the bandage. Long John gazed out through the window over the trees at the side of the hill. The rocks were shining in the weak evening sunlight and the clouds made shadows on the brown heather. The long mournful cry of a curlew came down the wind.

" There ain't an inch of that hill me foot didn't trod," Long John said in a low voice. " Nor a bush I didn't beat with me stick to set a rabbit or a hare. When I was a child knee-high to a grasshopper, I was thinking the parts of Ireland lies beyond that hill was heaven itself. 'Twas me mother told me so.

" ' When you go over that hill,' says she, and she pointing up from the door below with a hand was whiter than your own, ' when you goes over that hill, you'll see all heaven spread out below you on the other side.'

" All the days of me youth I'd spend standing at the door and looking up at that hill. I couldn't sleep in the long nights thinking about the great day I'd climb up to the top and look down into heaven, look down at God Himself sitting upon His throne, with the angels and saints around Him, looking down on this unhappy world where there's nothing but growing old and dying."

Long John laughed. He laughed up at the hill. " One day in the early morning when the whole house was still sleeping, I crept out with a brown terrier we had in them days and I climbed up to the top of that hill. I ran up it with the heart bursting in me side as if the twenty divils was after me, ran up it like a hare with hounds at his heels, for to see heaven. And what d'you think I saw? Bog."

Long John laughed again.

" I saw a bog went on for ever. Miles and miles of it, stretching away as far as me eye could see, till I was thinking maybe the whole world was nothing but one big bog, and only here on this side of the hill was fields with green grass in 'em and cattle grazing under the sky."

Long John shook his head slowly from side to side.

" The things we do be thinking when we're children. The queer ideas we do be getting into our small heads. 'Tis amusing surely."

The doctor unrolled the end of the bandage and looked at the gash on the side of Long John's head.

" 'Tis a magnificent wound," he said. " As fine a wound as I seen in me whole life."

" 'Twas no pebble I landed upon," Long John said proudly.

" Another man would have died on the spot," the doctor said. " You've a head on you is as hard as a piece of rock."

" 'Twas a mighty fall."

" How did it happen, and yourself a great rider of horses? " the doctor asked.

Long John shook his head. " That I can't tell you. I was riding the pony below in the long inch, when all of a sudden there came a pain on me chest; and before I knew where I was, I was

diving on the ground like the hawk himself diving down from the clouds."

"A pain in your chest you say?" the doctor asked casually.

"Wisha, yes. Here." Long John put his hand over his heart.

"Was this the first time you got a pain there?"

Long John shook his head. "I'm getting pain there on and off for years now."

"I wonder what that could be now?" the doctor said thoughtfully.

"I got struck there long 'go in a fight," Long John said. "Maybe there's a bone broke there or something. The bucko hit me was in hospital for a week with a broken nose."

"I'll have a look," the doctor said. "If 'tis all right with yoursel'."

"'Tis all one to me," Long John said.

The doctor quickly bandaged the wound. Then he took his stethoscope out of the bag and put the ends in his ears.

"That's a queer gadget you've got there," Long John said. He jumped when the metal disc touched his skin. "'Tis as cold as ice," he complained.

"We'll soon remedy that," the doctor said, and warmed the disc between his hands.

After about a minute he put it against Long John's chest again. He moved it round over the white skin, while his eyes stared at a point on the wall behind the bed.

"Is there a bone broke?" Long John asked.

The doctor folded the stethoscope and put it back in his bag. He sat again on the edge of the bed and lit a cigarette.

"John," he said, looking into the old man's eyes, "I don't want to frighten you, but I have to tell you that old heart of yours isn't as good as it used to be in days gone by."

"How so?" Long John asked, surprised. "When I lay down at night I can hear it banging away as loud as ever it did and I a youngster."

The doctor rubbed the bristles on his chin. "Look, John," he said, "that don't mean a thing."

"What d'you mean, it don't mean a thing, hah? How d'you know but that gadget of yours ain't gone all arseways and can't tell a good heart from a bad one, hah? Answer that if you can."

The doctor sucked in his breath. He leaned over and said, "John, will you promise me one thing? Will you?"

Long John smiled cunningly. "Tell me what 'tis first, and then maybe we'll see about making promises."

"Will you promise me to take things easy from this out?"

Long John threw back his head and laughed. "Take things

easy?" he said. "Ho-ho-ho. 'Tis a wonder you didn't ask me to leap over the moon.

"Wisha, man, I'm surprised at you asking a fella like meself to take things easy, and the two legs on me as mad for gallivanting as the legs of an eighteen-year-old or a March hare. How would an old fella the likes of me learn to take things easy now, and all me days I was moving from the first light to the going down of the sun in the western skies?"

He pointed out through the window.

"How could I lay here and be seeing that hill the whole live-long day without dying from the urge is on me all times to be climbing its sides and feeling the heather and the white stones under me boots? I tell you, Doctor, I'd sooner be in me grave with the earth on top of me."

The doctor nodded his head slowly. His eyes rested for a moment on the pipe and tobacco on the table. He sighed.

"You're a hard man," he murmured. He stood up and said, "I must be quitting you now. 'Tis getting late and darkness will be coming on."

"The blessing of God be upon you, Doctor," Long John said. "And a safe road to you."

The doctor said nothing. He stood for a moment looking down at the white face against the white pillow. Then he turned and left the room.

When he came into the kitchen, Bridie Carney was sitting before the fire with her head in her hands, staring into the fire. Denny was still standing at the door. He had not moved while the doctor had been upstairs with his father.

"How did you get round him, in the name of God?" Bridie asked, staring at the doctor in wonder. She rose to her feet. "How did you manage it, Doctor?"

"That's me own little secret," the doctor said with a smile.

The old woman clutched his arm. "What's the verdict?" she asked. "Is his head bad?"

The doctor looked out through the open door. The light was fading out of the sky, and the rocks were no longer shining on the side of the hill. The wind was loud in the trees.

"His head's all right," he said. "'Twasn't more than a scratch. However, Mrs. Carney, I examined your husband—a complete examination, you see—and 'tis me sad duty to have to tell you I found his heart in a terrible condition. 'Twas a heart-attack made him fall off the pony yesterday."

"Jesus, Mary, and Joseph!" the woman whispered, with her hand over her mouth. "A heart-attack, you say?"

The doctor nodded.

Denny laughed. " 'Tis small surprise," he said, " and the life he led."

His mother turned on him in a fury. " Will you hold your evil tongue? " she hissed.

Denny laughed again. " I will not," he said. " I'll say what I'm thinking, and what yourself is thinking too, with the face grey on you and the heart broken in your body from the life of misery he gave you. Aye, I'll say what we both are thinking."

" Will you hold up? "

They stood facing each other, the woman with her face twisted in anger, the man grinning. The doctor coughed.

" Mrs. Carney," he said, " I have to ask you to lower your voice —the smallest excitement might be the undoing of your husband."

" Holy Mother of God," she cried, looking at him with wild eyes. " Is it that bad, Doctor? "

" I'm afraid so," the doctor said quietly.

" 'Twould take more than excitement to kill the old scarecrow, I'm thinking," Denny said bitterly.

" Will you hold your tongue, " Bridie hissed, " or do I have to strike you? 'Tis easy seen your father's in his bed."

" Will you listen to her," he said, " and only yesterday itself she was tearing out her hair and wailing about him destroying her with his boozing and carousing and chasing the women of the valley."

Bridie raised her hand. " I'll strike you, you pup of hell, if you say another word."

Denny laughed. " Your blow won't change the truth."

A crooked grin curled the corners of his mouth.

The woman groaned. She put her hands over her head and turned away.

" Well, I must be off," the doctor said. " I've another patient I must see this night. Will you drive me down to the end of the boreen, Denny, where me car is waiting? "

Denny spat out of the door.

" I will not," he said. " Me mother will drive you down, the same as she brung you up. Mind you, I have nothing agin you—"

He broke off, staring in fear and amazement at Long John who had come silently down the stairs while he was talking. His mouth hung open.

" Old scarecrow is it you call your father? " Long John roared.

Denny raised one hand as if to protect himself.

" Mother of God," Bridie screamed, staring at the pale face of her husband.

" I'll give you scarecrow, you cur," Long John shouted.

He went up to his son and struck him with the flat of his hand on the side of the head. Denny moaned and cowered against the wall with his hands over his head. Long John hit him again.

"Drive the doctor to the end of the boreen," he ordered.

Still with his hands over his head, Denny edged along the wall towards the door.

"Stop," Long John ordered.

Denny stopped, trembling. Long John hit him again and gave him a push out the door.

"Take yourself out of here," he shouted, "afore I kill you."

Bridie Carney rushed forward and caught his arm. "Are you gone out of your head?" she cried.

Long John grinned at her.

"You were listening through the floor," she cried.

"Aye, woman," Long John said, nodding. "I was listening."

"You heard what the doctor said?"

"Aye, I heard." He turned to the doctor. "I'm sorry, Doctor, you were forced to see the conduct of that son of mine."

"I seen many such things in me life," the doctor said. He went to the door and looked out. "He's ready now, so I'll be leaving ye. Good-bye to ye both."

Long John and his wife went out with him to the gate. He turned and waved to them as the pony and cart went slowly down the boreen. Long John and his wife waved.

"Come back into the house, John," Bridie whispered.

Long John leaned on the gate. "I think I'll stay here awhile, Bridie girl," he said.

The woman looked up at the darkening sky beyond the moving trees.

"Come on in," she begged. "You'll catch your death of cold out here, with that east wind blowing and night coming on."

"I'll stay awhile all the same, Bridie. Go in yourself."

"No," she said. "I'll remain here with yourself."

Long John smiled. He stood with his elbows on the gate and looked up at the hill, dark now under the advancing night. His wife stood beside him, staring up at his pale face. The trees groaned in the wind.

"I'll see that hill in me grave," Long John murmured.

"Will you whisht, John."

"'Twill haunt me, and I lying in the ground."

"What kind of talk is that now," Bridie whispered, "for a man like yourself?"

"I know every inch of it. Every bush on it. There ain't a spring on its side I didn't drink out of, and I out hunting rabbits

at the dawn of day or dazzling 'em after night falling. I sat on top of it and looked out at the world lies beyond it."

"I climbed it meself in me young days," Bridie said proudly.

"I recall."

"'Twas a long time ago, God save us."

"That it was. 'Twas you were the fine bit of a girl, I remember, and you climbing up that hill with your yellow hair blowing out behind you in the wind."

"Aye, John. I wasn't bad then."

"Your neck was white."

"It could be. Me skin was white in them days."

Long John laughed. "You had the divil's own job keeping down your skirt, and the wind blowing it up around your thighs and meself watching."

"Aye, you were a holy terror in them days."

"I recall you fell and tore your hand upon a furzebush."

"Aye, and you laughed at me."

Long John smiled up at the hill.

"Come in out of the wind now," Bridie whispered.

"Go in yourself, girl. I'll be with you in two minutes."

"Is that a promise, John?"

"Aye. 'Tis a promise."

"Not like all the other promises?"

"No."

The woman went into the house. Long John leaned his chest against the gate and looked up at the hill. His long hair blew down over his eyes and he pushed it back. After two minutes he left the gate and moved towards the door. Wings beat the darkness over his head and a V of wild geese went up the wind towards the hill.

Long John stood at the door and watched them disappear over the top of the hill. Then he went into the house.

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THE INVITATION

The horse of poetry nibbles
The summer-riddled grass,
Lifting his heavy head
To the young girls as they pass;
Riderless he may drowse
Till the year turn over.
Leap girl upon his back
And he will race for ever.

DONAGH MACDONAGH

THAMES-SIDE VENICE

He seemed to be deeply enjoying the novelties of the situation

BY ELIZABETH TAYLOR

NOTHING could have been lovelier, Rose thought. For most of the day she stayed on the little balcony, looking out over the flooded fields. Although it was Friday, Gilbert had not come and she was sure now that he would not come, and was shaken with laughter at the idea of him rowing out to her from the railway station across the river and meadows, bowler-hatted and red with exasperation.

This day was usually her busiest of the week, when she stopped pottering and worked methodically to make the ramshackle villa and herself clean and tidy. By four o'clock she would be ready, and Gilbert, who was punctual over his illicit escapades as with everything else, would soon after drive down the lane. Perhaps escapade was altogether too exciting a word for the homely ways they had drifted into. She fussed over his little ailments far more than his wife had ever done, not because she loved him more, or indeed at all, but because her position was more precarious.

On Saturday mornings he left her, having broken his long journey from the North, as he told his wife. He often thought how furious she would have been if she had known that the break was only twenty miles from London, where they lived.

As soon as he left her on Saturdays, Rose went down to the shops by the station, cashed the cheque he had given her, and bought some little treats for herself to while away the weekend—a few slices of smoked salmon, chocolate peppermint-creams, and magazines. She loved the rest of that day. Gilbert had gone—she could shut herself in and be cosy till he came again.

Only the faintest of regrets ruffled her comfort—little faults in herself that depressed her slightly but could easily be rectified later on. She was shamefully lazy, she knew, and self-indulgent. All the time she meant to save money, but never did. Gilbert was not very generous. His Friday nights were expensive and

★ *Elizabeth Taylor has been writing since she was a child. She has had six novels published—the last was "A Wreath of Roses"—and a collection of stories, "Hester Lilly." She's married, with two children, lives in Bucks.*

he knew it and very rarely gave Rose a present. The house was in his name. She really had nothing.

Her fur coat, which she had worn all day as she leaned over the balcony rail watching the seagulls on the flood water, was shabby and baggy; he had given it to her years ago at the beginning of their liaison when she was still working for him. It was squirrel, and his wife would not have been seen dead in it.

He certainly won't come now, Rose decided, looking at the forsaken water. There had really never been the slightest likelihood of it, and that was just as well, she thought, catching sight of herself in a glass as she was a making a cup of tea. A dark band showed at the parting of her golden hair and she had run out of peroxide.

Some young boy had come in a rowing-boat that morning—a boy scout, perhaps—and had offered to do her shopping. She had wrapped some money up in the shopping-list and let it down in a basket from the bedroom window. Later he had brought back a loaf of bread and some milk, a pound of sausages and cigarettes, a dozen candles. She would have liked a half-bottle of gin, but had not liked to write it down. The peroxide she had quite forgotten.

She made tea on the primus stove Gilbert had bought for their river picnics. These were in July always, when his wife went to stay with her mother in the Channel Islands. Then he moved in with Rose for a whole fortnight; from niggardly motives made love to her excessively, became irritable, felt cramped in the uncomfortable little house and exasperated by the way it was falling to pieces. The primus stove was hardly ever used. It was too often raining, or they were in bed, or both. Rose was afraid it would blow up, but now, with the floodwater in the downstairs rooms, she had to overcome her fears or go without tea.

The sun was beginning to set and she knew how quickly it did so these winter days. She took her cup of tea and went out on to the balcony to watch. Every ten years or so, the Thames in that place would rise too high, brim over its banks and cover the fields for miles, changing the landscape utterly. The course of the river itself she could trace here and there from lines of willow trees or other landmarks that she knew.

Beyond, on what before had been the other bank, a little train was crossing the floods. The raised track was still a foot or two above river level. Puffing along, reflected in the water, it curved

away into the distance and disappeared among the poplar trees by the church. There, all the gravestones were submerged, and the inn had the river flowing in through the front door and out of the back.

"Thames-side Venice," a newspaper reporter had called it. The children loved it, and now Rose saw two young boys rowing by on the pink water. The sun had slipped down through the mist, was very low, behind some grey trees blobbed with mistletoe; but the light on the water was very beautiful. The white seabirds scarcely moved and a row of swans went in single file down a footpath whose high railing tops on either side broke the surface of the water.

Rose sipped her tea and watched, intent on having the most of every second of the fading loveliness—the silence and the reflections and the light, and then the silence broken by a cat crying far away or a shout coming thinly across the cold air.

"I'm glad he didn't come," she said aloud.

At this hour, other men, husbands, those who had not sent their families away, would be returning. The train was at the station and they would take to their boats and row homewards, right up to their staircases, tying up to the newel-post and greeted from above by their children. Rose imagined them all as lake dwellers and hoped that they were enjoying the adventure.

She was curious about her neighbours—the few of them scattered along the river bank. She wondered about them when she passed by on her way to the shops, but she had never spoken to them or been inside their houses, and she had never wished to do so. Her solitariness suited her and her position was too informal. She would not embarrass other people by her situation.

But she made up stories to herself about some of them, especially about the people at the white house nearby who came only at weekends. They seemed very gay, and laughter and music went on till late on Sunday nights. From where she was, she could just see the eaves of their boathouse sticking out of the river, but the house itself lay farther back and out of sight.

It was growing dark very fast, and the water, a moment or two earlier rosy, whitened as the sun went down. Under the high woods, out of the wind, the fields were frozen, their black and glassy surface littered with broken ice that boys had thrown.

Suddenly, at last, Rose could bear no more. The strangeness overcame her and she went inside and washed her cup and saucer in the bathroom basin and emptied the teapot over the banisters into the flooded passageway.

A swan had come in through the front door. Looking austere and suspicious he turned his head about, circled aloofly, and

returned to the garden. It was weird, Rose thought. This was a word she often used. So many things were to her either weird or intriguing.

The sunset, for instance, had been intriguing, but the sudden beginning of the long evening, the swan coming indoors, the smell of the water lying down there was very weird. She drew the curtains across the balcony doors. They would not meet and she clipped them together with a clothes-peg to keep the darkness hidden.

The bedroom was crowded with furniture and rolled-up matting rescued from downstairs, and looked like a corner of a junk shop. Nothing was new or matched another thing. It had all no doubt been bought off old barrows or hunted for in attics, so that the house could be called furnished when it was let. Wicker uncurled from the legs of an armchair and caught Rose's stockings as she passed by, and in the mornings when she made the bed she picked up dozens of blond feathers from the eiderdown.

It was the first time she had ever had a house to herself. After years of living with her married sister, it had seemed wonderful to put the frying-pan on her own stove and fry her own sausages in it, and she had felt a little self-conscious as if she was playing at keeping house and did so before an audience, as in the imaginary games of her childhood.

For a time she could not be quite natural on her own. Look at me all the way round, from any angle, I really am a housewife. You won't catch me out, she often thought. But no one was ever there but Gilbert, and he, indifferent to the intriguing notion of her keeping house, sat with his back to her and read his pink newspaper.

In the end the magic had gone, she tired of her role, and the home was not one, she saw, that anyone could take a pride in, especially this evening, with candlelight making the crowded room macabre.

"I shall never get the place straight afterwards," she said. She talked to herself a great deal nowadays.

She had forgotten the beauty of the flooded landscape and was overcome by wretchedness. The woman at the post office had warned her of the filth the receding water would leave behind, the smell that lingered, the stained walls and woodwork, and doors half twisted off their hinges.

Earlier that week, as she watched the rockery slowly going under, then the lower boughs of shrubs and very soon the higher ones, Rose had felt apprehensive. She had never had any experience in the least like it. Yet, when the worst happened and the house was invaded, perched up above it, enisled, as if she was

hibernating in these unusual surroundings, she had begun to feel elated instead.

Her sister, worried to death from reading about the Thames-side Venice in the newspapers, wrote to ask her to stay. The letter had come by boat and was taken up in a basket through the bedroom window. *Roy and I wish you would come back for good, you know that*, Beryl had written. The children missed her. They had been told that she had gone away to work, and the same story did for the neighbours, but they were less likely to think it true.

Roy said that his sister-in-law was wasting herself and ruining her chances. Once a girl takes up with married men, he had told his wife, she will find herself drifting from one to the other and she'll never get married herself. This Beryl left out of the letter.

Rose had been frank about her plans but, wary from long practice of secret affairs, had kept Gilbert's name to herself. "The man I'm going out with," she had called him at the beginning, and so she still wrote of him. She would have made someone a good wife, her brother-in-law often said, knowing what men liked. The house was pleasanter when she was there and the children were easier to manage.

A letter must be written to still her sister's fears. All day, Rose had put it off, but now began to look for some writing paper. The wardrobe door swung open as she crossed the room and she saw her reflection in the blurred glass front. My hair! she thought. She had a suspicion that she might be beginning to let herself go, a serious mistake for one in her position.

When she had found the paper and a bottle of green ink, she cleared a corner of the table and began to write. *Dear B., You'd laugh if you could see me at this minute.*

She glanced round the room and then, smiling to herself, began to describe it. She was a born letter writer, Beryl said, and she tried consciously to display her talent.

The church clock struck seven. The chimes had a different sound, coming across water instead of grassy meadows. She paused, listened, her chin on her hand and her eyes straying to the curtained door. She thought now that she could hear something moving on the water outside and she went to the window and parted the curtains.

Below her, she could see two figures in a punt, one standing and using the pole, the other sitting down and fanning torchlight back and forth across the darkness.

Going next door, she thought, as she sat down again and dipped the pen into the ink. *It's up to the second stair now*, she wrote, and then had to jump up to go to see. Last thing at night, first

thing in the morning, and a dozen times a day she would go out to the landing to see if the water had risen or fallen.

The house was open to anyone and the keys of the upstairs rooms had long ago been lost. The swan had come in and so might rats. Nervously, she peered over the banisters.

The water was disturbed and was slapping the threshold and swaying against the staircase. She could hear laughter and then a man's voice echoing up the well of the staircase, calling out to ask if she was safe. Quite safe and well, the voice persisted. Torchlight ran up the walls and vanished, and a boat grated against some steps outside.

"Yes, I'm all right," she called. "Who is it?"

"Next door."

The light came bobbing back across the threshold. Holding the torch was a young man, wading carefully through the water, his trousers rolled up above his pale knees. He came to the bottom of the stairs and looked up at her. His smile was the beginning of laughter, and he seemed to be deeply enjoying the novelties of the situation.

"Are you all alone?" he asked. Then he hurried over the indiscretion and, giving her no time to reply, said, "Don't you mind being up there? We saw the light."

She was tempted to say that she did mind. Then, perhaps, he would come up the stairs and talk to her for a little while. "No, I don't mind," she replied.

"We saw your light," he said again. "I just wondered if you were all right. 'She might be lying there ill for all we know,' I said to Tony." ("Dead," he had really said.) "'We'd better make sure,' I said."

They were both a little drunk. So endearing, Rose found this. It was a long time since she had been with anyone who was in the least intoxicated; Gilbert dully carried his drink and often remarked upon the fact.

"We went to get some whisky."

He seemed not to notice the cold, standing there in the icy water.

"What fun," she said. She smiled back at him. As she leant over the banisters, he spotlighted her with the torch and could see the top of her breasts, white against the green of her jersey as she bent towards him.

A jolly nice bosom, he thought. She seemed to be what he and Tony called a proper auntie. I shall bring out the maternal in her, he thought, and between the banister slats examined her pretty legs. So many plump women have slim ankles. He had often noticed this.

"Why don't you come with us?" he said. "I can carry you to the boat."

"Don't be silly. More like I'd have to carry you."

"Well, paddle, then. It's not cold. It's lovely in."

She had put her hand up to her hair, so he knew that she would come; but, before, would go through all the feminine excuses about her appearance.

"There's only us," he said. "You look very nice to me. What my brother thinks is of no importance. I can't stand in this water much longer, though." He held out his arms.

"I'll take off my stockings then."

She went quickly back to her room. When she had rolled off her stockings and put them into her coat pocket, screwed up the ink bottle, she took up her shoes and blew out the candles. The hardly-started letter was left lying on the table.

"I *could* do with a drink," she said. "I didn't like to ask that errandboy to fetch some gin. Breaking the law, I suppose."

The torchlight led her down the stairs, and there the young man took her shoes from her and put them in his pockets. He steadied her with his arm as she hitched up her skirt and stepped down into the icy water.

"Oh, my God," she gasped and began to giggle, wading on tiptoe towards the doorway.

"Got her?" Tony shouted. He was sitting in the boat, holding on to the rustic-work porch.

If it all comes away in his hands, Gilbert will go mad, Rose thought, smiling in the darkness.

They helped her into the boat, and Tony, letting go of the porch, gave her a cigarette, lighting it first and putting it into her mouth with the intimacy which comes easily in a time of peril or exultation.

"You can put your stockings on now," said the young man whom Tony called Roger. "No more paddling. We row straight in through the french windows to the landing-stage at the foot of the stairs."

Tony gave a final push at the rustic-work porch and swung the punt towards the next-door garden. Bottles jingled against one another under the seat, and when Roger had wiped Rose's feet with a damp handkerchief, he reached for a whisky bottle, took off the wrapping-paper, and let it blow away across the water.

"Keep the cold out," he urged Rose, trying to hold the bottle to her lips. "Your teeth are chattering. Never mind, nearly there, and we've a wonderful oilstove going upstairs."

As the boat swayed, whisky trickled over her chin; then she put her hands over his and, steadying them, took a long drink.

I'll bet she's been a barmaid, thought Roger.

" Jolly boating weather," Tony sang, and the punt slipped over the still water, and the white house next door came into sight.

" Isn't it all lovely? " Rose murmured.

" Not to be missed," said Roger.

The next morning she slept late. It was nearly noon before she was properly awake, and any errandboys who might have called her from below had gone away unanswered. Even when she was wide awake at last, she lay in bed staring at the curtains pinned across the window, striving to remember all she could of the evening before.

In bright moonlight they had brought her home in the boat and their singing must have carried a long way across the water. I don't care if the boat capsizes, she had thought.

When she waded indoors they called good night; and she went upstairs and, still with wet bare feet, watched from the window until they were out of sight.

Quite clearly across the water, she heard Roger say, " Well, that worked out all right, didn't it? "

A moment later, a gust of laughter came back to her, and she had wondered uneasily if they were laughing about her. But they were highspirited boys, she reminded herself. They would laugh at anything. Perhaps Tony had let go of the punt pole.

Before her return home, there must have been hours and hours of sitting on the floor and drinking in what they called " Mamma's bedroom." An oilstove threw a shifting daisy pattern on the ceiling, and two pink candles had been burning on the dressing-table—must surely have burnt themselves out.

How long was I there? she wondered. And how did we pass the time? While it was happening it had seemed one of the loveliest evenings of her life and she was sorry to have forgotten a moment of it.

The peach-coloured bedroom was draped with satin, and a trail of wet footprints went back and forth across the white carpet. Mamma's wedding photograph was on a little table, and Rose had at one point suddenly asked, " Whatever would your mother say about this? " By " this " she meant herself being there, not the empty bottles and the cigarette smoke and the dirty glasses.

" We'll clear up afterwards," Roger said. The other bedrooms were full of furniture from downstairs. They had been sent from London to rescue it.

Now it was Saturday morning and she could not walk down to the shops to buy her little weekend treats. Today there was no

cheque to cash, and for the first time she realised how much she was at Gilbert's mercy.

She got out of bed and began to search the room for money, found thirty shillings in one bag, some pennies dusty with face powder in another, half a crown in her mackintosh pocket, and a florin in a broken cup on the chest of drawers. She could survive the week until he came again, just as she could survive until Monday on stale bread and the rest of the sausages.

Yes, I can survive all right, she told herself briskly, and pulled off her nightgown and began to dress.

A glimpse in the wardrobe mirror as she crossed the room depressed her. She was getting too fat and her sister would see a difference in her.

But when? she wondered. There was the unfinished letter on the table. When she had made herself a cup of tea she would make an effort to write it. I shall go on surviving and surviving, and growing fatter and fatter, she thought, and her lips were pressed together and her eyes flickered because she was frightened.

She lit the primus stove and then unpegged the curtains and opened the balcony windows. Outside, a great change had taken place while she slept. The floods were subsiding. Along the bank of the railway track she could see grass, and in the garden the tops of shrubs and bushes had come up for a breath of air and were steaming in the sunshine. She remembered that last night, as the two young men punted away, she had heard one of them say, "The water's going down," and she had felt regret, as if a party was nearing its end.

It was going down more rapidly than it had risen, draining away into the earth, evaporating into the air, hastening down gratings. The adventure was nearly over and in its diminuendo had become an exasperation. What had been so beautiful yesterday was now an inconvenience, and Rose, on her island, would have to drink her tea without milk.

Surely those two dear boys will come, she thought. They had concerned themselves about her last night when they did not know her; it seemed more likely that they would do so today. She so convinced herself of this that, in the middle of sipping her tea, she went into the bathroom to make something of her face.

But they did not come and the day went slowly. She watched from the window and it was a dull, watery world she saw. The crisis was over and the seabirds beginning to fly away. She finished writing her letter and propped it up against the clock, which had stopped.

When it was dark she pinned the curtains together again and sat down at the table, simply staring in front of her; at the back

of her mind, listening. In the warm living-room of her sister's house, the children in dressing-gowns would be eating their supper by the fire; Roy, home from a football match, would be lying back in his chair. Their faces would be turned intently to the blue-white shifting screen of the television.

Rose's was another world, candlelit, silent, lifeless. The church clock chimed seven and she got up and wound up her own clock and set it right; then sat down again, stiffly, with her hand laid palm downwards on the table like an old woman.

They asked me for fun, she told herself. It was just a boyish lark—quite understandable; a joke they wouldn't dream of repeating. If I ever see them again, other weekends, they'll nod, maybe, and smile; that's all; not that, if their mother's with them. At their age, they never look back or do the same thing twice.

As she had come towards middle age, she had developed a sentimental fondness for young men—especially those she called the undergraduate type, spoilt, reckless, gay, with long scarves twisted round their necks. Roger had, as he predicted, brought out the maternal in her. Humbly, with great enjoyment, she had listened to their banter, the family jokes, a language hardly understood by her, whom they had briskly teased but gallantly drawn in. So the hours must have passed.

Their mother won't be best pleased about that carpet, she thought, and she got up and took the last cigarette from the packet.

All of Sunday the waters receded. Morning and evening the church bells rang across the meadows in which ridges and hillocks of sodden grass stood up. One or two cars splashed down the lane during the afternoon, keeping to the crown of the road and making a great wash.

By Monday morning the garden path was high and nearly dry. Rose looked over the banisters at the wet, muddy entrance and found it difficult to believe that the swan had ever swum about down there. It was all over.

She could go out now and post her letter and fetch what she wanted from the shops; and on Friday Gilbert would come, and on all the Fridays after, she supposed, though she could never be quite sure. So she would survive from year to year, and one day soon would begin a diet and perhaps save some money for her old age.

It was like being in prison, she thought of the last few days. Sunday had been endless and she had cried a little and gone to bed early, but remained awake, yet on other Sundays she most often

stayed indoors all day or pottered about the garden, and had always been contented.

Now she was set free and she put on her coat, took the letter from the shelf, and looked out of the window once more to make sure that it was really safe to go out and walk on the earth again. And that really was the sum of her freedom—for the first time the truth of this dawned in her. She could go out and walk to the shops, like a prisoner on parole, and spend the money Gilbert had given her, or save it if she could, and then she would turn back and return, for there was nothing else to do.

The clock ticked—a sound she knew too well. There were other sounds which were driven into her existence—the church bells and the milkman's rattle—and they no longer sufficed and had begun to torment her. Her contentment with them had come to an end.

The exciting thought occurred to her that it was in her power to fly away from them for ever. Nothing could stop her.

For a moment she stood quite still, her head tilted as if she was listening, and then she suddenly turned her handbag upside down and tipped the money on to the table. What will Gilbert do? she wondered, as she counted the coins. He would never have visualised her doing anything impulsive, would stand in the porch bewildered, amazed that she did not open the door at once and, when he had sorted out his own key and let himself in, his face would be a picture, she thought.

"I'd like to see it," she said aloud, and scooped up the money and dropped it back into her bag. Where would he break his journey that night? she wondered. Or would he perhaps go petulantly home to his wife?

She was smiling as she quickly packed her suitcase, almost shook with laughter when she slammed the door and set off down the muddy path. Such a dreadful mess she had left behind her.

She felt warm in her fur coat as she picked her way down the lane. The floods had shifted the gravel about and made deep ruts, the hedgerows were laced with scum; but the valley was recovering, cows were being driven back to the pastures and hundreds of birds were out scavenging.

The letter was still in Rose's hand but, as she stopped for a moment by a stile to rest, she suddenly screwed it up and tossed it over the hedge, knowing she would reach Beryl first.

© Elizabeth Taylor 1960

★ ★ ★

RARE EXCEPTION

A steak is the exception to the rule that what's worth doing is worth doing well.

THE LAST SPIN

The word was hard coming—
he said it softly, his eyes on Dave's face

BY EVAN HUNTER

THE BOY sitting opposite him was his enemy.

The boy sitting opposite him was called Tigo, and he wore a green silk jacket with an orange stripe on each sleeve. The jacket told Dave that Tigo was his enemy. The jacket shrieked, "Enemy, enemy!"

"This is a good piece," Tigo said, indicating the gun on the table. "This runs you close to forty-five bucks if you try to buy it in a store."

The gun on the table was a Smith & Wesson .38 Police Special.

It rested exactly in the centre of the table, its sawn-off two-inch barrel abruptly terminating the otherwise lethal grace of the weapon. There was a chequered walnut stock on the gun, and the gun was finished in a flat blue. Alongside the gun were three .38 Special cartridges.

Dave looked at the gun disinterestedly. He was nervous and apprehensive, but he kept tight control of his face. He could not show Tigo what he was feeling. Tigo was the enemy, so he presented a mask to the enemy, cocking one eyebrow and saying, "I seen pieces before. There's nothing special about this one."

"Except what we got to do with it," Tigo said.

Tigo was studying him with large brown eyes. The eyes were moist-looking. He was not a bad-looking kid, Tigo, with thick black hair and a nose that was maybe too long, but his mouth and chin were good. You could usually tell a cat by his mouth and his chin. Tigo would not turkey out of this particular rumble. Of that Dave was sure.

"Why don't we start?" Dave asked. He wet his lips and looked across at Tigo.

"You understand," Tigo said, "I got no bad blood for you."

"I understand."

"This is what the club said. This is how the club said we should settle it. Without a big street diddlebop, you dig? But I want you to know I don't know you from a hole in the wall—except you wear a blue-and-gold jacket."

"And you wear a green-and-orange one," Dave said, "and that's enough for me."

"Sure, but what I was trying to say—"

"We going to sit and talk all night, or we going to get this thing rolling?" Dave asked.

"What I'm trying to say," Tigo went on, "is that I just happened to be picked for this, you know? To settle this thing that's between the two clubs. I mean, you got to admit your boys shouldn't have come in our territory last night."

"I got to admit nothing," Dave said flatly.

"Well, anyway, they shot at the candy store. That wasn't right. There's supposed to be a truce on."

"O.K., O.K.," Dave said.

"So like—like this is the way we agreed to settle it. I mean, one of us and—and one of you. Fair and square. Without any street boppin', and without any Law trouble."

"Let's get on with it," Dave said.

"I'm trying to say, I never even see you on the street before this. So this ain't nothin' personal with me. Whichever way it turns out, like."

"I never seen you neither," Dave said.

Tigo stared at him for a long time. "That's 'cause you're new around here. Where you from originally?"

"My people come down from the Bronx."

"You got a big family?"

"A sister and two brothers, that's all."

"Yeah, I only got a sister." Tigo shrugged. "Well." He sighed. "So." He sighed again. "Let's make it, huh?"

"I'm waitin'," Dave said.

Tigo picked up the gun, and then he took one of the cartridges from the table-top. He broke open the gun, slid the cartridge into the cylinder, and then snapped the gun shut and twirled the cylinder. "Round and round she goes," he said, "and where she stops, nobody knows."

"There's six chambers in the cylinder," Tigo said, "and only one cartridge. That makes the odds five to one that the cartridge'll be in firing position when the cylinder stops whirling You dig?"

"I dig."

"I'll go first," Tigo said.

Dave looked at him suspiciously. "Why?

"You want to go first?"

"I don't know."

"I'm giving you a break," Tigo grinned. "I may blow my head off first time out."

" Why you giving me a break? " Dave asked.

Tigo shrugged. " What the hell's the difference? " He gave the cylinder a fast twirl.

" The Russians invented this, huh? " Dave asked.

" Yeah."

" I always said they was crazy bastards."

" Yeah, I always—" Tigo stopped talking. The cylinder was still now. He took a deep breath, put the barrel of the .38 to his temple, and then squeezed the trigger.

The firing-pin clicked on an empty chamber.

" Well, that was easy, wasn't it? " he asked. He shoved the gun across the table. " Your turn, Dave."

Dave reached for the gun. It was cold in the basement room, but he was sweating now. He pulled the gun towards him, then left it on the table while he dried his palms on his trousers. He picked up the gun then and stared at it.

" It's a nifty piece," Tigo said. " I like a good piece."

" Yeah, I do too," Dave said. " You can tell a good piece just by the way it feels in your hand."

Tigo looked surprised. " I mentioned that to one of the guys yesterday, and he thought I was nuts."

" Lots of guys don't know about pieces."

" I was thinking," Tigo said, "when I get old enough I'll join the Army, you know? I'd like to work around pieces."

" I thought of that, too. I'd join now, only my old lady won't give me permission. She's got to sign if I join now."

" Yeah, they're all the same," Tigo said, smiling.

" I better spin," Dave said.

" Yeah," Tigo agreed.

Dave slapped the cylinder with his left hand. The cylinder whirled, whirled, and then stopped. Slowly, Dave put the gun to his head. He wanted to close his eyes, but he didn't dare. Tigo, the enemy, was watching him. He returned Tigo's stare, and then he squeezed the trigger.

His heart skipped a beat, and then over the roar of his blood he heard the empty click. Hastily, he put the gun down.

" Makes you sweat, don't it? " Tigo said.

Dave nodded, saying nothing. He watched Tigo. Tigo was looking at the gun.

" Me now, huh? " he said. He took a deep breath, then picked up the .38. He shrugged. " Well." He twirled the cylinder, waited for it to stop, and then put the gun to his head.

" Bang! " he said, and then he squeezed the trigger. Again the firing-pin clicked on an empty chamber. Tigo let out his breath and put the gun down.

"I thought I was dead that time," he said.

"I could hear the harps," Dave said.

"This is a good way to lose weight, you know that?" Tigo laughed nervously, and then his laugh became honest when he saw that Dave was laughing with him. "Ain't it the truth? You could lose ten pounds this way."

"My old lady's like a house," Dave said, laughing. "She ought to try this kind of a diet." He laughed at his own humour, pleased when Tigo joined him.

"That's the trouble," Tigo said. "You see a nice deb in the street, you think it's crazy, you know? Then they get to be our people's age, and they turn to fat." He shook his head.

"You got a chick?" Dave asked.

"Yeah, I got one."

"What's her name?"

"Aw, you don't know her."

"Maybe I do," Dave said.

"Her name is Juana." Tigo watched him. "She's about five-two, got these brown eyes."

"I think I know her," Dave said. He nodded. "Yeah, I think I know her."

"She's *nice, ain't she?*" Tigo asked. He leaned forward, as if Dave's answer was of great importance to him.

"Yeah, she's nice," Dave said.

"The guys rib me about her. You know, all they're after—well, you know—they don't understand something like Juana."

"I got a chick, too," Dave said.

"Yeah? Hey, maybe some time we could—" Tigo cut himself short. He looked down at the gun, and his sudden enthusiasm seemed to ebb completely. "It's your turn."

"Here goes nothing," Dave said. He twirled the cylinder, sucked in his breath, and then fired.

The empty click was loud in the stillness of the room.

"Man!" Dave said.

"We're pretty lucky, you know?" Tigo said.

"So far."

"We better lower the odds. The boys won't like it if we—" He stopped himself again, and then reached for one of the cartridges on the table. He broke open the gun again, and slipped the second cartridge into the cylinder. "Now we got two cartridges in here," he said. "Two cartridges, six chambers. That's four to two. Divide it, and you get two to one." He paused. "You game?"

"That's—that's what we're here for, ain't it?"

"Sure."

"O.K., then."

"Gone," Tigo said, nodding his head. "You got courage, Dave."

"You're the one needs the courage," Dave said gently. "It's your spin."

Tigo lifted the gun. Idly, he began spinning the cylinder.

"You live on the next block, don't you?" Dave asked.

"Yeah." Tigo kept slapping the cylinder. It spun with a gently whirring sound.

"That's how come we never crossed paths, I guess. Also I'm new on the scene."

"Yeah, well you know, you get hooked up with one club, that's the way it is."

"You like the guys in your club?" Dave asked, wondering why he was asking such a stupid question, listening to the whirring of the cylinder at the same time.

"They're O.K." Tigo shrugged. "None of them really send me, but that's the club on my block, so what're you gonna do, huh?" His hand left the cylinder. It stopped spinning. He put the gun to his head.

"Wait!" Dave said.

Tigo looked puzzled. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing. I just wanted to say—I mean—" Dave frowned. "I don't dig too many of the guys in my club, either."

Tigo nodded. For a moment their eyes locked. Then Tigo shrugged, and fired.

And then the empty click filled the basement room.

"Phew!" Tigo said.

"Man, you can say that again."

Tigo slid the gun across the table. Dave hesitated an instant. He did not want to pick it up. He felt sure that this time the firing-pin would strike the percussion cap of one of the cartridges —that this time he would shoot himself.

"Sometimes I think I'm turkey," he said to Tigo.

"I feel that way sometimes, too," Tigo said.

"I never told that to nobody," Dave said. "The guys in my club would laugh at me if I ever told them that."

"Some things you got to keep to yourself. There ain't nobody you can trust in this world."

"There should be somebody you can trust," Dave said. "Hell, you can't tell nothing to your people. They don't understand."

Tigo laughed. "That's an old story. But that's the way things are. What're you gonna do?"

"Yeah. Still, sometimes I think I'm turkey."

"Sure, sure," Tigo said. "It ain't only that, though. Like sometimes—well, don't you wonder what you're doing stomping some guy in the street? Like—you know what I mean? Like—who's the guy to you? What you got to beat him up for? 'Cause he messed with somebody else's girl?" Tigo shook his head. "It gets complicated sometimes."

"Yeah, but—" Dave frowned again. "You got to stick with the club. Don't you?"

"Sure, sure; no question." Again their eyes locked.

"Well, here goes," Dave said. He lifted the gun. "It's just—" He shook his head, and then twirled the cylinder. The cylinder spun, and then stopped. He studied the gun, wondering if one of the cartridges would roar from the barrel when he squeezed the trigger.

Then he fired.

Click.

"I didn't think you was going through with it," Tigo said.

"I didn't neither."

"You got heart, Dave." Tigo said. He looked at the gun. He picked it up and broke it open.

"What you *doing*?" Dave asked.

"Another cartridge," Tigo said. "Six chambers, *three* cartridges. That makes it even money. You game?"

"You?"

"The boys said—" Tigo stopped talking. "Yeah, I'm game," he added, his voice curiously low.

"It's your turn, you know."

"I know."

Dave watched as Tigo picked up the gun.

"You ever been row-boating on the lake?"

Tigo looked across the table at him, his eyes wide. "Once," he said. "I went with Juana."

"Is it—is it any kicks?"

"Yeah. Yeah, it's grand kicks. You mean, you never been?"

"No," Dave said.

"Hey, you got to try it, man," Tigo said excitedly. "You'll like it. Hey, you try it."

"Yeah, I was thinking maybe this Sunday I'd—" He did not complete the sentence.

"My spin," Tigo said wearily. He twirled the cylinder. "Here goes a good man," he said, and he put the revolver to his head and squeezed the trigger.

Click.

Dave smiled nervously. "No rest for the weary," he said. "But you got heart. I don't know if I can go through with it."

"Sure, you can," Tigo assured him. "Listen; what's there to be afraid of?" He slid the gun across the table.

"We keep this up all night?" Dave asked.

"They said—you know—"

"Well, it ain't so bad. I mean, hell, we didn't have this operation, we wouldn'ta got a chance to talk, huh?" He grinned feebly.

"Yeah," Tigo said, his face splitting in a wide grin. "It ain't been so bad, huh?"

"No, it's been—well, you know, these guys in the club, who can talk to them?" He picked up the gun.

"We could—" Tigo started.

"What?"

"We could say—well—like we kept shootin' an' nothing happened, so—" Tigo shrugged. "What the hell! We can't do this all night, can we?"

"I don't know."

"Let's make this the last spin. Listen; if they don't like it, they can take a flying leap, you know?"

"I don't think they'll like it. We supposed to settle this for the clubs."

"Screw the clubs!" Tigo said vehemently. "Can't we pick our own—" the word was hard coming; when it came, he said it softly, and his eyes did not leave Dave's face—"friends?"

"Sure we can," Dave said fervently. "Sure we can! Why not?"

"The last spin," Tigo said. "Come on, the last spin."

"Gone," Dave said. "Hey, you know, I'm *glad* they got this idea. You know that? I'm actually glad!" He twirled the cylinder. "Look, you want to go on the lake this Sunday? I mean, with your girl and mine? We could get two boats. Or even one if you want."

"Yeah, one boat," Tigo said. "Hey, your girl'll like Juana. I mean it. She's a swell chick."

The cylinder stopped. Dave put the gun to his head quickly. "Here's to Sunday," he said. He grinned at Tigo, and Tigo grinned back, and then Dave fired.

The explosion rocked the small basement room, ripping away half of Dave's head, shattering his face. A small sharp cry escaped Tigo's throat, and a look of incredulous shock knifed his eyes.

Then he put his head on the table and began weeping.

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★

Flight of Fancy

Up in the air, so high, so high

W. S. GILBERT

Uncle, whose inventive brains
Kept evolving aeroplanes,
Fell from an enormous height
On our garden lawn last night.
Flying is a fatal sport:
Uncle wrecked the tennis court.

Ruthless Rhymes for Heartless Homes

All this—and Beds, Too!

No detail has been overlooked in ensuring the utmost in comfort and convenience for travellers on long-distance flights. Sky-lounge chairs can be adjusted to individual requirements for complete relaxation. Private sky-rooms are fitted with real beds . . .

Air France Advertisement

I'm bored with the length and the wingspan,
And horsepower gives me no pleasure:
The why and the wherefore
Of speed I don't care for . . .
But what does the stewardess measure?

RICHARD ARMOUR, *Advice to Those Who Write the Ads for Airlines*

Screaming Willies

The first inkling I had that I wasn't flying in a TWA Constellation came when sharp pains started running up my legs. But they didn't stay there long. Suddenly they hit me in the stomach. I had the feeling Rocky Marciano had somehow sneaked into the cockpit and let me have it. At the end of the spin the plane was barrelling along at five hundred miles an hour. I stuck my eyeballs back in their sockets. I looked to see how the other Sabre Jets were doing. They had not moved an inch from our wing tips.

But Major Dillard seemed dissatisfied. "Let's try it again, boys, and this time tighten up."

"They looked pretty tight to me, Major," I said.

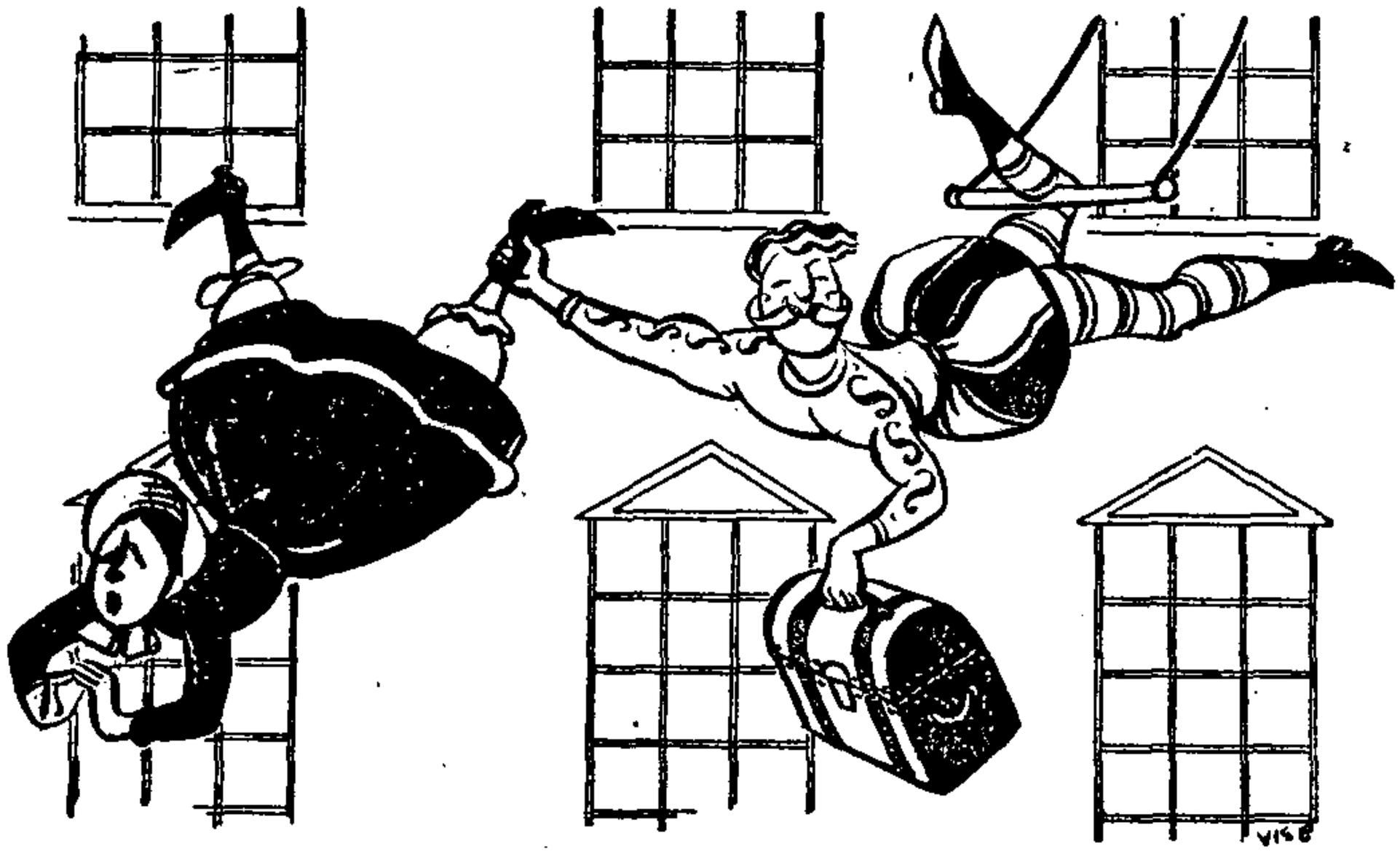
"I'll give the orders," he replied. "And by the way, if you're going to scream the next time would you please turn off your intercom?" . . .

When we pulled out of the last one the major asked me, "Did you black out?"

I said I didn't.

"I did," he chuckled.

ART BUCHWALD, *I Chose Caviar*



He lowered her down from a four-storey flight
By means of his flying trapeze.

ANON

Tailspin

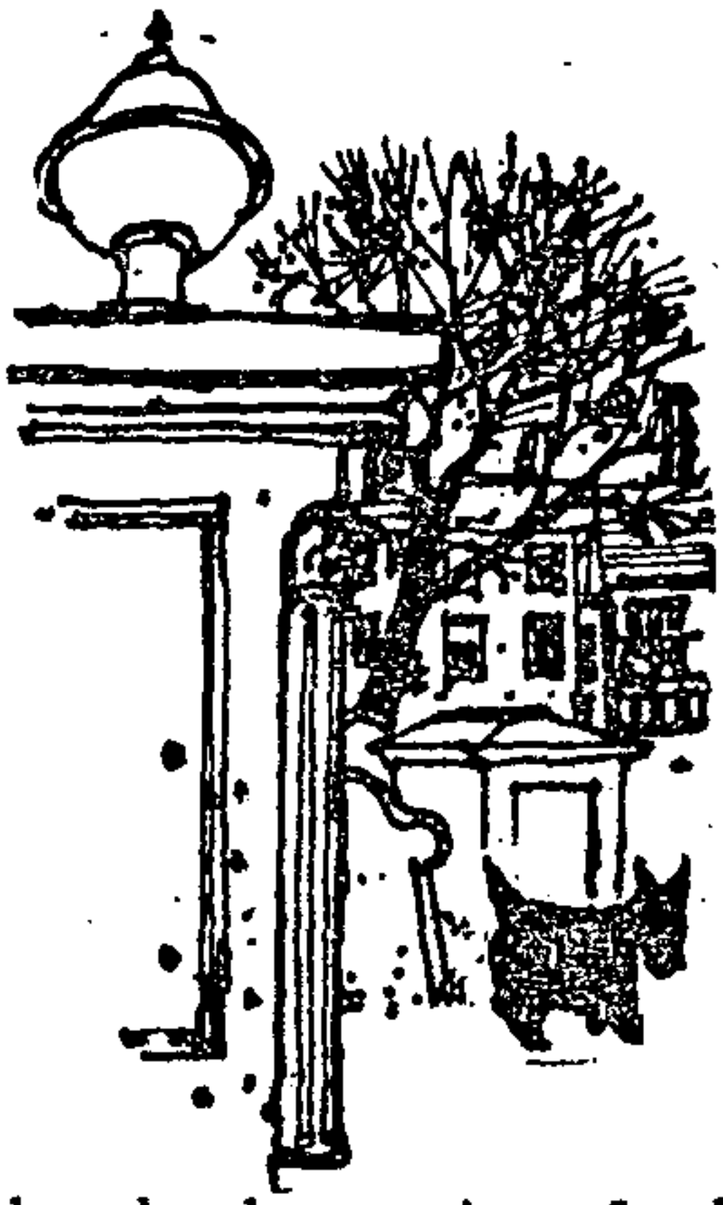
Once upon a plane trip, I sat directly back of a little old lady who was giving every indication that this was her first experience in air travel and that as far as she was concerned, it might well prove to be her last. The flight happened to be an uneventfully calm one . . . so much so that the captain felt free to take time out in the main cabin for that routine chitchat with each passenger. When came the old lady's turn, he leaned over her chair and with a pleasant smile inquired politely, "Is everything all right?"

The poor little soul jumped as though she'd been jabbed with an ice pick. "Is everything all RIGHT?" she squealed in a note of near hysteria. "You're asking *me?* YOU ought to know!"

CORNELIA OTIS SKINNER, *The Ape in Me*

ABNER of the PORCH

GEOFFREY HOUSEHOLD



WHEN my voice broke, even Abner and MacGillivray understood my grief. I did not expect sympathy from MacGillivray, for he had no reason to like me. But he knew what it was to be excluded from cathedral ceremonies. He was the Bishop's dog.

Abner was masterless. I would not claim that he appreciated the alto's solo in the *Magnificat* when the organ was hushed and there was no other sound in the million and a half cubic feet of the cathedral but the slender purity of a boy's voice; yet he would patronise me after such occasions with the air of the master alto which he might have been.

Though not a full tom, he knew the ancestral songs which resemble our own. To our ears the scale of cats is distasteful, but one cannot deny them sustained notes of singular loveliness and clarity.

Abner's career had followed a common human pattern. My father was the gardener, responsible for the shaven lawns and discreet flowerbeds of the cathedral close. Some three years earlier he had suffered from an invasion of moles—creatures of ecclesiastical subtlety who avoided all the crude traps set for them by a mere layman.

The cat, appearing from nowhere, took an interest. After a

The feud became more subtle

week he had caught the lot, laying out his game-bag each morning upon the tarpaulin which covered the mower.

Fed and praised by my father, he began to pay some attention to public relations and attracted the attention of visitors. Officially recognised as an ornament of the cathedral when his photograph appeared in the local paper, he ventured to advance from the lawns and tombstones to the porch. There he captivated the Dean, always politely rising from the stone bench and thrusting his noble flanks against the gaitered leg.

He was most gracious to the Bishop and the higher clergy, but he would stroke only the Dean. He knew very well from bearing and tone of voice, gentle though they were, that the cathedral belonged to him. It was the Dean who christened him Abner.

To such a personage the dog of our new Bishop was a disaster. MacGillivray was of respectable middle age, and had on occasion a sense of dignity; but when dignity was not called for, he behaved like any other Aberdeen terrier and would race joyously round the cathedral or across the close, defying whatever human being was in charge of him to catch the lead which bounced and flew behind.

His first meeting with his rival set the future tone of their relations. He ventured with appalling temerity to make sport of the cathedral cat.

Abner stretched himself, yawned, allowed MacGillivray's charge to approach within a yard, leapt to the narrow and rounded top of a tombstone and, draping himself over it, went ostentatiously to sleep. MacGillivray jumped and yapped at the tail tip which graciously waved for him, and then realised that he was being treated as a puppy.

After that the two passed each other politely but without remark. In our closed world of the cathedral such coolness between servants of Dean and servants of Bishop was familiar.

MacGillivray considered that he should be on permanent duty with his master. Since he was black, small, and ingenious, it was difficult to prevent him. So devoted a friend could not be cruelly chained—and in summer the french windows of the Bishop's Palace were always open.

He first endeared himself to choir and clergy at the ceremony of the Bishop's installation. Magnificent in mitre and full robes, the Bishop at the head of his procession knocked with his crosier upon the cathedral door to demand admission. MacGillivray, observing that his master was shut out and in need of help, hurtled across the close, bounced at the door, and added his excited barks to the formal solemnity of the Bishop's order.

Led away in disapproving silence, he took the enormity of his crime more seriously than we did. On his next appearance he behaved with decent humility, following the unconscious Bishop down the chancel and into the pulpit with bowed head and tail well below the horizontal.

Such anxious piety was even more embarrassing than bounce. It became my duty, laid upon me by the Bishop in person, to ensure on all formal occasions that MacGillivray had not evaded the butler and was safely confined. I was even empowered to tie him up to the railings on the north side of the close in cases of emergency.

I do not think the Bishop ever realised what was troubling his friend and erring brother, MacGillivray—normally a dog of sense, who could mind his own business however great his affection for his master. When he accompanied the Bishop around the diocese he never committed the solecism of entering a parish church and never used the vicar's cat as an objective for assault practice.

His indiscipline at home was, we were all sure, due to jealousy of Abner. He resented with Scottish obstinacy the fact that he was ejected in disgrace from the cathedral, whereas Abner was

not. He could not be expected to understand that Abner's discreet movements were beyond human control.

The Dean could and did quite honestly declare that he had never seen that cat in the cathedral. Younger eyes, however, which knew where to look, had often distinguished Abner curled up on the ornate stone canopy over the tomb of a seventeenth-century admiral. In winter he would sometimes sleep upon the left arm of a stone crusader in the cavity between shield and mailed shirt—a dank spot, I thought, until I discovered that it captured a current of warm air from the grating beside the effigy. In both his resting-places he was, if he chose to be, invisible. He was half Persian, tiger-striped with brownish grey on lighter grey, and he matched the stone of the cathedral.

As the summer went by, the feud between Abner and MacGillivray became more subtle. Both scored points.

MacGillivray, if he woke up feeling youthful, used to chase the tame pigeons in the close. One morning, to the surprise of both dog and bird, a pigeon failed to get out of the way in time and broke a wing. MacGillivray was embarrassed. He sniffed the pigeon, wagged his tail to show that there was no ill feeling, and sat down to think.

Abner strolled from the porch and held down the pigeon with a firm, gentle paw. He picked it up in his mouth and presented it with liquid and appealing eyes to an elegant American tourist who was musing sentimentally in the close. She swore that the cat had asked her to heal the bird—which, by remaining a whole week in our town, in and out of the vet's consulting-room, she did.

Personally, I think that Abner was attracted by the feline grace of her walk and was suggesting that, as the pigeon could be of no more use to the cathedral, she might as well eat it. But whatever his motives, he had again made MacGillivray look a clumsy and impulsive fool.

MacGillivray's revenge was a little primitive. He deposited bones and offal in dark corners of the porch and pretended that Abner had put them there. That was the second worst crime he knew—to leave on a human floor the inedible portions of his meals.

The verger was deceived and submitted a grave complaint in writing to the Dean. The Dean, however, knew very well that Abner had no interest in mutton bones, old or new. He was familiar with the cat's tastes. Indeed it was rumoured from the Deanery that he secreted a little box in his pocket at meals, into which he would drop such delicacies as the head of a small trout or the liver of a roast duck.

I cannot remember all the incidents of the cold war. And,

anyway, I could not swear to their truth. My father and the Dean read into the animals' behaviour motives which were highly unlikely and then shamelessly embroidered them, creating a whole miscellany of private legend for the canons and the choir. So I will only repeat the triumph of MacGillivray and its sequel, both of which I saw myself.

That fulfilment of every dog's dream appeared at first final and overwhelming victory. It was September 1st, the feast of St. Giles, our patron saint. Evensong was a full choral and instrumental service, traditional, exquisite, and attracting a congregation whose interest was in music rather than religion. The Bishop was to preach.

Perhaps the effort of composition, of appealing to well-read intellectuals without offending the simpler clergy, had created an atmosphere of hard work and anxiety in the Bishop's study. At any rate MacGillivray was nervous and mischievous.

While I was ensuring his comfort before shutting him up, he twitched the lead out of my hand and was off on his quarter-mile course round the cathedral looking for a private entrance. When at last I caught him, the changes of the bells had stopped. I had only five minutes before the processional entry of the choir. There wasn't even time to race across the close and tie him up to the railings.

I rushed into the north transept with MacGillivray under my arm; pushed him down the stairs into the crypt, and shut the door behind him. I knew that he could not get out. Our Norman crypt was closed to visitors during service, and no one on a summer evening would have reason to go down to the masons' and carpenters' stores, the strongroom, or the boilers. All I feared was that MacGillivray's yaps might be heard through the gratings in the cathedral floor.

I dived into my ruffled surplice and took my place in the procession, earning the blackest possible looks from the choirmaster. I just had time to explain to him that it was the fault of MacGillivray.

I was not forgiven, but the grin exchanged between choirmaster and precentor suggested that I probably would be—if I wasn't still panting by the time that the alto had to praise all famous men and our fathers that begat us.

St. Giles, if he still had any taste for earthly music, must have approved his servants that evening. The Bishop, always an effective preacher, surpassed himself. His sinewy arguments were of course beyond me, but I had my eye—vain little beast that I was—on the music critics from the London papers, and

I could see that several of them were so interested that they were bursting to take over the pulpit and reply.

Only once did the Bishop falter, when the barking of MacGillivray, hardly perceptible to anyone but his master and me, caught the episcopal ear. Even then his momentary hesitation was put down to a search for the right word.

I felt that my desperate disposal of MacGillivray might not be appreciated. He must have been audible to any of the congregation sitting near the gratings of the northern aisle. So I shot down to release him immediately after the recessional. The noise was startling as soon as I opened the door. MacGillivray was holding the stairs against a stranger in the crypt.

The man was good-dogging him and trying to make him shut up: He had a suitcase by his side.

When two sturdy vergers, attracted by the noise, appeared hot on my heels, the intruder tried to bolt—dragging behind him MacGillivray with teeth closed on the turn-ups of his trousers. We detained him and opened the suitcase. It contained twenty pounds' weight of the cathedral silver. During the long service our massive but primitive strongroom door had been expertly opened.

The congregation was dispersing, but Bishop, Dean, Archdeacon, and innumerable canons were still in the cathedral. They attended the excitement just as any other crowd. In the circumstances MacGillivray was the centre of the most complimentary fuss. The canons would have genially petted any dog. But this was the Bishop's dog. The wings of gowns and surplices flowed over him like those of exclamatory seagulls descending upon a stranded fish.

Dignity was represented only by our local superintendent of police and MacGillivray himself. When the thief had been led away, he reverently followed his master out of the cathedral; his whole attitude reproached us for ever dreaming that he might take advantage of his popularity.

At the porch, however, he turned round and loosed one short, triumphant bark into the empty nave. The Bishop's chaplain unctuously suggested that it was a little voice of thanksgiving.

So it was—but far from pious. I noticed where MacGillivray's muzzle was pointing. That bark was for a softness of outline, a shadow, a striping of small stone pinnacles upon the canopy of the admiral's tomb.

For several days—all of ten I should say—Abner deserted both the cathedral and its porch. He then returned to his first friend, helping my father to make the last autumn cut of the grass and offering his catch of small game for approval.

The Dean suggested that he was in need of sunshine. My father shook his head and said nothing. It was obvious to both of us that for Abner the cathedral had been momentarily defiled. He reminded me of an old verger who gave in his resignation—it was long overdue anyway—after discovering a family party eating lunch from paper bags in the Lady Chapel.

He went back to the porch a little before the Harvest Festival, for he always enjoyed that. During a whole week while the decorations were in place he could find a number of discreet lairs where it was impossible to detect his presence. There may also have been a little hunting in the night. We did not attempt to fill the vastness of the cathedral with all the garden produce dear to a parish church, but the Dean was fond of fat sheaves of wheat, oats, and barley, bound round the middle like sheaves on a heraldic shield.

It was his own festival in his own cathedral, so that he, not the Bishop, conducted it. He had made the ritual as enjoyable as that of Christmas, reviving ancient customs for which he was always ready to quote authority. I suspect that medieval deans would have denied his interpretation of their scanty records, but they would have recognised a master of stage management.

His most effective revival was a procession of cathedral tenants and benefactors, each bearing some offering in kind which the Dean received on the altar steps. Fruit, honey, and cakes were common, always with some touch of magnificence in the quality, quantity, or container.

On one occasion the landlord of the Pilgrim's Inn presented a roasted peacock set in jelly with tail feathers erect. There was some argument about this on the grounds that it ran close to advertisement, but the Dean would not be dissuaded. He insisted that any craftsman had the right to present a unique specimen of his skill.

That year the gifts were more humble. My father, as always, led the procession with a basket tray upon which was a two-foot bunch of black grapes from the vinery in the canons' garden. A most original participant was a dear old nursery gardener who presented a plant of his dwarf camellia which had been the botanical sensation of the year and could not yet be bought for money. There was also a noble milk-pan of Alpine strawberries and cream—which, we hoped, the cathedral school would share next day with the almshouses.

While the file of some twenty persons advanced into the chancel, the choir full-bloodedly sang the 65th Psalm to the joyous score of our own organist. The Dean's sense of theatre

was as faultless as ever. Lavish in ritual and his own vestments, he then played his part with the utmost simplicity. He thanked and blessed each giver almost conversationally.

Last in the procession were four boys of the cathedral school bearing a great silver bowl of nuts gathered in the hedgerows. The gift and their movements were traditional. As they separated, two to the right and two to the left, leaving the Dean alone upon the altar steps, a shadow appeared at his feet and vanished so swiftly that by the time our eyes had registered its true, soft shape it was no longer there.

The Dean bent down and picked up a dead fieldmouse.

He was not put out of countenance for a moment. He laid it reverently with the other gifts. No one was present to be thanked; but when the Dean left the cathedral after service and stopped in the porch to talk to Abner he was—to the surprise of the general public—still wearing his full vestments, stiff, gorgeous, and suggesting the power of the Church to protect and armour with its blessing the most humble of its servants.

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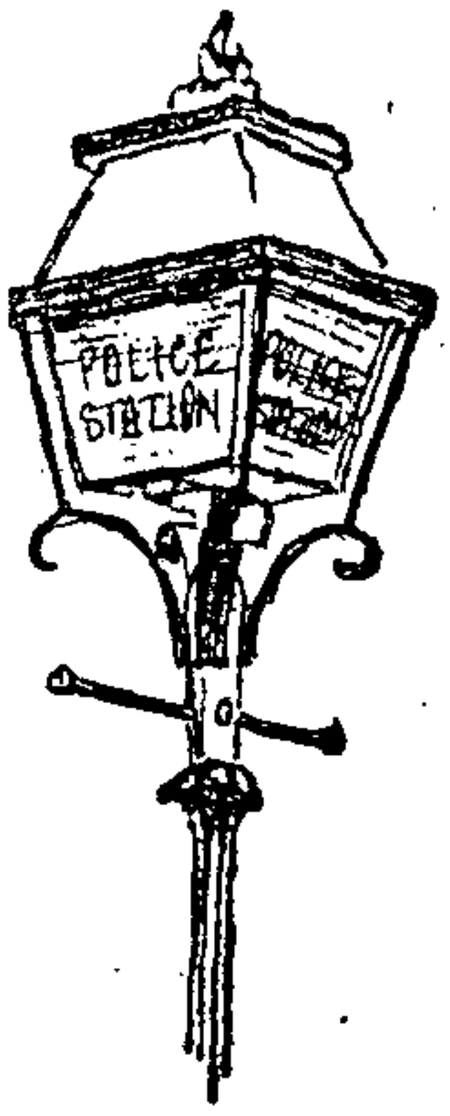
" Hey, I've found a furry caterpillar ! "



A PATRICK PETRELLA STORY

THE FACTS OF LIFE

But how to explain it all
to Miss Postance?

BY MICHAEL GILBERT

"IF I've told you once, I've told you a hundred times," said Mr. Pincott. "When in doubt, ask 'em what it is. Just ask. You've got a tongue in your head?"

Leonard admitted that he had a tongue in his head. It was his object to keep Mr. Pincott in a good humour, for Mr. Pincott was in charge of the Suburban and South-Eastern Left Luggage Office at Victoria, and was thus in charge also of Leonard who, as a probationary railway-worker, clerical grade, Class 3, depended on Mr. Pincott's tolerance for most of the comforts of life.

"If they make a False Declaration as to Contents," continued Mr. Pincott, warming to his theme, "there's a statutory fine for that—five pounds, rising to fifteen on a second conviction."

He scrutinised the carton with the stout webbing straps round it. "What did you take it in as?"

"I took it in as a package, Class A1," said Leonard.

"Class A1 is packages measuring no more than twelve inches in any dimension," said Mr. Pincott. He brought out a ruler and applied it to the object on the counter in front of him. "*As* I thought, thirteen and a half inches long. That brings it into A2. *If* it's a package."

To Leonard it certainly looked like a package. But he wasn't going to argue the toss. Not with Mr. Pincott.

"If it can be brought in under any more specialised heading," said Mr. Pincott, "it is not correct to bring it in as a package. For instance, if it's a television set, a trombone (cased), or a tent, it's A3. On the other hand, if it's a typewriter, a trombone (uncased), or a travelling-rug (folded), it's A1."

"I don't think it's any of those, Mr. Pincott," said Leonard.

"Something's coming out of that corner. It looks like grey putty."

It was this damaged corner which had caused the box to be brought up for inspection. It was made of tough compressed cardboard, tightly sealed at every crack with adhesive paper. There was no indication on the outside of what it contained or where it had come from. Round the box ran a pair of stout webbing bands, buckled tightly and joined by a leather handle.

"Seeing," said Mr. Pincott, "that there is reason to suppose that this box may have been taken in under an incorrect description, and in view of the fact that it has been damaged and the contents may be deteriorating, I feel it to be my duty to open it."

As Leonard well knew, Mr. Pincott was composing the speech for the defence in case of possible repercussions. His real motives were plain, but had not been stated. It was his ambition to consummate a long and successful career in the Left Luggage Office by making some dramatic discovery, preferably in a criminal context. A very old friend of his, Mr. Snape, had been the man who had noticed the dark seepage from the bottom of a cabin trunk in the Charing Cross Left Luggage Office which had been the first step in the case of the headless barmaid.

Mr. Pincott carefully removed the strapping; then took a pair of scissors out of the drawer in front of him, inserted the point under the centre strip of adhesive paper, and drew it along the line of the crack.

This fetched Detective Inspector Patrick Petrella. Victoria Station was not in his manor, but in the absence of a colleague he was doing detachment duty as well as his own work, and was a badly-harassed man.

"It's high explosive, all right," said Sergeant Ouvry, who had come from Central as the result of an urgent telephone call. He picked up one of the pencil-shaped, mud-grey objects which lay embedded in a nest of wire wool in the now open cardboard box.

"Gelignite?"

"No. It certainly isn't gelignite." He carried it across to the light for closer examination. "I think it's the new Nobel 808 plastic explosive. I'd have to take a sample back to the laboratory to make sure."

"You'll take it all away," said Mr. Pincott. "And the sooner the better."

"I'm not sure about that," said Petrella.

Mr. Pincott said, "You're not leaving it here. That's quite clear. Contrary to all Regulations. See By-laws governing the

Carriage and Storage of Explosive Substance 1934, amended 1953."

"It's quite safe, actually," said Sergeant Ouvry. "You could bounce it on the floor without doing yourself much harm. You need an electric detonator to set this stuff off."

"Not in my store," said Mr. Pincott.

"I could see the Supervisor," said Petrella. "I imagine he would agree if I explained how important it was. And if you were nervous about it—and I could well understand that, too—he could arrange for someone else to take charge here, temporarily—"

Mr. Pincott hesitated. He was torn between the dictates of prudent common sense and the call of glory. Glory, as it has so often done before, carried the day.

"As long as this gentleman is absolutely certain," he said, "that it won't blow up in all our faces."

"I once slept for a month with a trunkful of it under my bed," said Sergeant Ouvry . . .

Petrella had some complicated arrangements to make. And there was no time to lose in making them. A gang which was intelligent enough to cache its explosive in a Railway Left Luggage Office until the moment when it needed to use it, was likely to be fairly alert.

"I'll have someone watching for the rest of today," he said. "Tonight, when you close, we'll get our engineers in. They can rig up a private telephone line between here and Wilton Road Station. Wilton Road can relay a message to the other stations and to patrol cars. Could you guarantee to keep anyone who comes for a package waiting for—say, five minutes, without arousing their suspicions?"

Pincott said that he thought there should be no difficulty about this.

"And I don't mind betting," said Petrella, "that whatever happens, it will be just after I've gone off duty."

In fact, it was half past eleven next morning that things started up. Mr. Pincott had formed a mental picture of the man who would present receipt No. 090424. Heavily built, scowling, thickset, his face very possibly scarred by some incautious experiment with gelignite.

"He'll be an ugly customer, all right," said Mr. Pincott to Leonard. "You got the drill fixed? I send you to get the box from the annexe, you pop out, use the telephone behind the door, wait one minute, then come back and say, was it 424 or 425? And I say—"

"That's all right, Mr. Pincott. I remember it."

It was a shock to both of them when the ticket was presented by a boy on roller skates.

It was a shock for Petrella, too. His plans had envisaged almost every method of carriage from pedal cycle to highpowered car. They had not catered for a carrier who could move along a crowded pavement, rip down an alleyway open to pedestrians only, descend a flight of steps, or cross an open space of park—all at a steady average of eight or ten miles an hour.

Twice he thought he had lost the boy. The first time was when he made his way straight through the middle of the booking hall of St. James's Park Underground Station; then, as the only car left in the chase thrashed wildly round the corner, executed a neat stern turn and came back in his tracks.

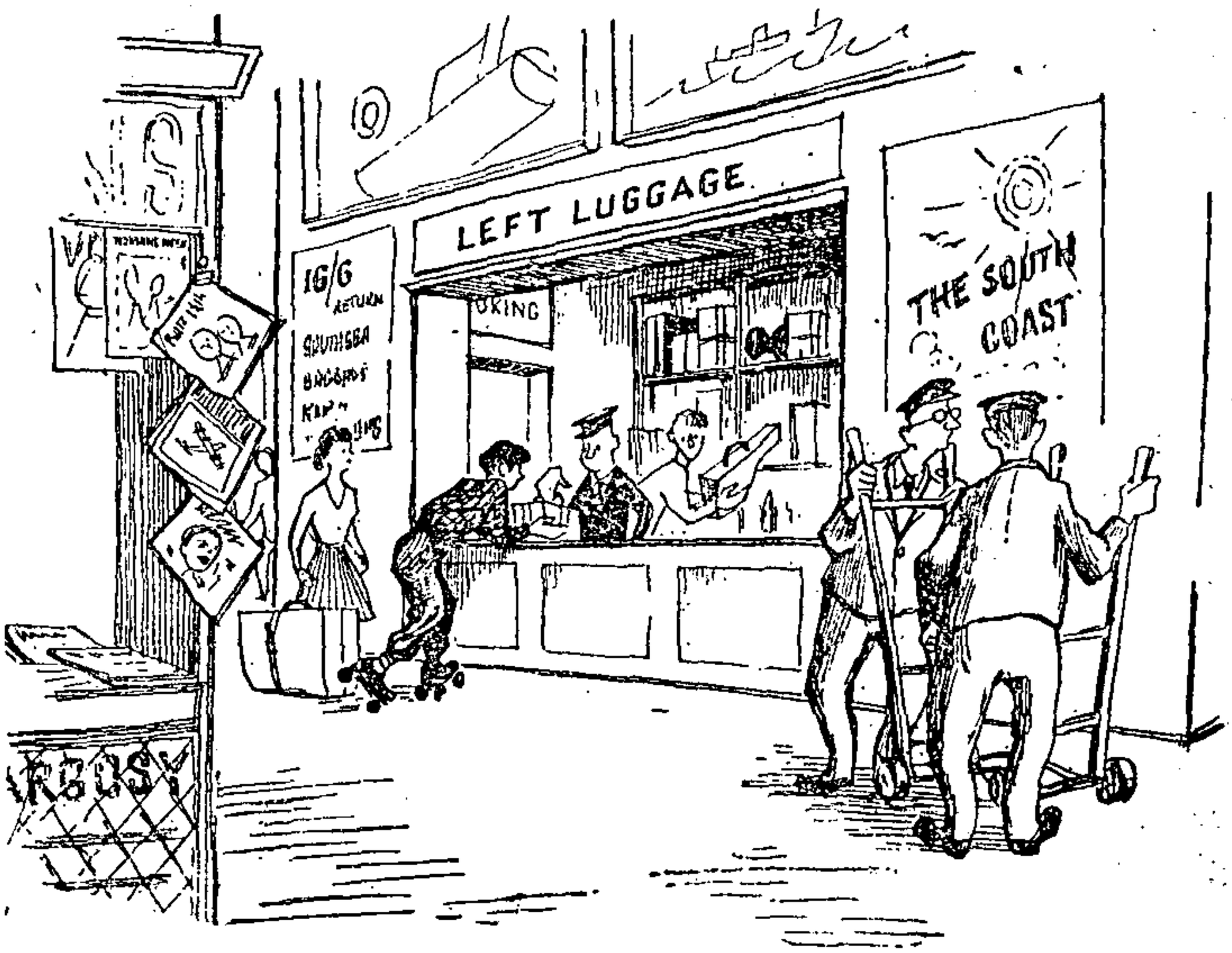
It was at this point that Petrella decided to dismount his pursuit force. He and Sergeant Morris jumped out.

"He's making for the park," said Petrella. "Wilmot, you're youngest. The car'll take you to Parliament Square. See if you can get ahead of him. Morris, take the Palace end. I'll act as whipper-in."

The car disappeared.

Sergeant Morris, who was far from young and not built for pursuit, groaned and set his sixteen stone in motion. Petrella sped down Petty France and through Queen Anne's Gate.

The boy was still in sight, going steadily.



Petrella found himself in immediate difficulties. If he ran, he would at once make himself conspicuous. If he walked, he would soon be out of the chase.

A bicycle was propped against the kerb. Petrella commandeered it.

At the end of Birdcage Walk the boy hesitated. Then swung left, and started back diagonally along one of the paths leading to the ponds. Petrella, confident of his superior speed, gave him a hundred yards' start, and mounted to pedal after him.

A park keeper loomed.

"No bicycling on this path, if you please."

"Oh, damn," said Petrella. "I'm a police officer, on duty."

"Riding a lady's bicycle?"

"Certainly," said Petrella. "Have you never heard of camouflage?"

He managed to find his warrant card. The park keeper peered at it shortsightedly, then stepped reluctantly back.

"It's irregular," he said.

The boy had now turned left again, and was momentarily masked by a clump of bushes. Petrella reckoned that there was no need to follow him directly. If he took the third side of the triangle, he should cut him off.

And so it fell out. When they reached the broad forecourt of Buckingham Palace, things were under control again. The boy was moving steadily, but more slowly. Sergeant Morris, after one startled look at his superior officer, had got back into the chase again.

They left the park, turned into the maze of small streets which surround the old brewery site, passed the stage door of the Palace Theatre, crossed the road, and re-entered Victoria Station.

Mr. Pincott, who was engaged in entering particulars of a lost receipt in his ledger, looked up. His eyes nearly popped out of his head.

"What do *you* want?" he said.

"Want to deposit this box," said the boy.

Mr. Pincott picked it up. The first thing he noticed was that it felt a great deal lighter. "What's in it?" he said.

"Nothing to do with you," said the boy. "Just give me a ticket. How much?"

"That depends what's in it."

"Actually," said the boy, "I'm doing this for my aunt. It's got a pair of her corsets in it."

A girl who had joined the queue giggled, and the boy rewarded her with a glance out of the corner of his eye which made her giggle again.

"Less of it," said Mr. Pincott. "I'll accept it as a package, Class C. That's one and threepence."

"Cheap at the price," agreed the boy.

He paid and departed.

Petrella let him go. He wanted to see what was in the carton.

"Sauce!" said Mr. Pincott. "His aunt's corsets!"

"I've got a feeling we've been short-changed," said Petrella. "Open her up."

It turned out to be a folded travelling-rug.

"As I thought," said Mr. Pincott. "Wrong category. We've overcharged him fivepence."

"Two boys," said Petrella, later that day to Superintendent Benjamin. "Two similar boys, both on roller skates. And two similar parcels. I think the change took place behind those bushes in the park. But there were lots of other places it could have been done."

"You and Sergeant Morris have seen both boys," said Benjamin. "Wilmot's seen one of them. I expect they're locals. You'll pick 'em up again."

"Maybe," said Petrella. "But that doesn't mean we'll pick the gang up. They probably just hired the boys for the day."

"They don't sound like amateurs to me," said Benjamin. "They sound like a pair of smart operators. That type's always in trouble. Keep your eyes open. You'll spot 'em before long, you see."

Benjamin was right.

Petrella himself saw the first boy—slightly taller, slightly darker than the second boy—a few days later coming out of a barber's shop in The Cut. He swung in discreetly behind him. He was aware from his previous experience that he was following someone who had eyes in the back of his head, and he took no chances.

The chase was a short one and ended at the Kennington Oval Magistrates' Court.

The boy walked straight in at the side entrance, and Petrella was in time to see him go through the door marked:

WAITING-ROOM. PROBATION CASES ONLY

He went round to the front of the Court and had a word with the Sergeant in charge.

"Miss Postance does all our juveniles," said the Sergeant.

"Oh, what's happened to Miss Appleyard?"

"She's doing mental cases now. Transferred to Surrey Docks."

"I'd better have a word with Miss Postance," said Petrella.

"Give me a ring at Gabriel Street when she's finished and I'll come right over."

He respected the band of underpaid, overworked men and women who tried to make sense of the Probation Service. The more senior female members of the service filled him with the sort of awful respect which he had accorded to his own nanny, an iron-jawed Englishwoman who had disapproved of everything in Spain.

Miss Postance was a surprise. To start with, she was young; not more, he guessed, than twenty or thereabouts. In addition she was good-looking, with the firm good looks often illustrated on the front page of Society weeklies. It was soon clear, however, that she and Miss Appleyard had at least one thing in common. Miss Postance, too, was strongminded.

"His name is Thomas," she said. "Bill Thomas. His brother, Alec, reports to me, too."

"Could I have their address, please?" said Petrella.

"21 Hayford Street," she said. "But you're not to interfere with either of them."

"I wasn't thinking of interfering with them," said Petrella.

"I'm sure you know what I mean. They're sound boys, both of them. A little mischievous, but good-hearted. I'm afraid their home background isn't good."

"They looked nice cheerful types," agreed Petrella. "What's wrong with their home?"

"Their mother and father are dead. They live with an old man who calls himself their uncle."

"Where do they go to school?"

"They've both left the Borough High School now. They're over fifteen. The headmaster wanted to keep them on to try for a scholarship, but their uncle wouldn't let them stay."

"Who told you that?" said Petrella.

"The boys told me. And I saw no reason to disbelieve them."

She looked even younger when she flushed up.

"Is there a charge against them?"

"No," said Petrella. "No charge as yet. We've every reason to think that they're stringing along with a safe-blowing mob."

"Have you any real evidence of that?"

Petrella told her the story.

"They may not have known what was in the box."

"Then why would they have laid on all those elaborate preparations for a switch?"

"Suppose it was put up to them as a joke. The people who employed them wouldn't have to explain what it was about."

"It's just possible, I suppose," said Petrella.

"If there's any doubt, you must give them the benefit of it," she said. "They're so young, and so essentially nice, I'm sure." As she said this, she herself looked so young and so essentially nice that Petrella simply hadn't the heart to say anything more. This, as he admitted afterwards, was a mistake.

He made two more inquiries that afternoon. First he called on the headmaster at the South Borough High School. Mr. Wetherall was an old friend and, incidentally, his landlord. He searched the school records but, although there were plenty of Thomases, he could find no trace of the brothers William and Alec.

"I've got fourteen hundred in the school this year," he said, "but I still manage to get to know most of them, and I couldn't forget brothers who looked so alike. We haven't had any since the Conlans, and that was five years ago. And it couldn't be them, anyway, because one's in Australia and the other's in Wormwood Scrubs."

Petrella then paid a visit to the barber's shop which he had seen Billy come out of, and came away thoughtful. In the natural course of things his next call would have been on the boys' soi-disant uncle, but in this case his instinct warned him to be careful.

Instead, he called on Superintendent Benjamin and explained his difficulties to him.

"I could follow the Thomases," he said. "Or have them followed. They know me too well by now. It'd take a lot of men and a lot of trouble. And I don't think it'd work. They're a very experienced pair. The other way is to make a list of all the likely jobs and pick the likeliest."

"There're an awful lot of banks in London," said Benjamin.

"True," said Petrella. "But we've got a little to go on. They drew on their explosive 'bank' three days ago. They wouldn't do that until just before the job."

"But there hasn't been any job—not in the last three days."

"Right," said Petrella. "And that means that our manœuvres round Victoria scared them off the job they had planned. So they've got to line up another one. It'll take a bit of time. And my bet is that the casing will be done by the Thomases. They can go anywhere, do anything. Suppose they're caught somewhere they shouldn't be—climbing a wall, on private property—boys up to some mischief. No one gives it a second thought."

"Something in that," said Benjamin. "See if you can get a look at the Banks Security List for the next few weeks."

The Central Organisation of London Banks in Lombard Street maintains a record of over-average deposits of cash at any of

its member branches. Race meetings, market days, the coincidence of a large number of paydays—anything which can result in an unusual accumulation of cash in an otherwise normal branch is carefully recorded and tabulated. A list is kept of the dangerous days and even the dangerous hours during which security precautions must be redoubled.

It is a list which quite a few people would like to see, and it needed a request from a very high authority indeed before Petrella was admitted into the inner sanctum of the Lombard Street office.

"We'd rather, on the whole," said the mild-mannered custodian, "that you didn't make any actual notes."

"That's all right."

"Take as long as you like, of course."

Petrella stared down, fascinated, at the chart which showed the drifts, the reefs, the deeps and shallows, the set of the currents which regulated the movement of a million bank notes.

"I'm only really interested in quite a small area of South London," he said.

"It's an odd thing," said the custodian, "but a working-class district like that is extremely conservative.

"The West End, and even the City, changes its pattern from month to month, but south of the river the money's been moving the same way for fifty years. There's more of it now, of course."

Petrella went back to Gabriel Street with a list of four probables and fourteen possibles in his head. There he found Sergeant Morris waiting for him with a photograph. It had the fuzzy look of a photograph taken with a miniature camera and then enlarged, and showed two boys coming out of a doorway together, arm in arm.

"Chummy pair, aren't they?" said Morris.

"The faces are clear enough," said Petrella. "Let's have eighteen prints made. You and Wilmot can do the work. I'm not going to appear in this myself. Not until later on, anyway. Get round all these branches. It'll take you a bit of time."

"How do you reckon we'd better handle it?"

"I should get along there just before the bank closes. See the manager, and ask him to assemble the staff as soon as the doors are closed. Then let them all take a good look at the photograph. They can keep a copy and pin it up somewhere if they like. If anyone spots either of these types anywhere near the bank, I want to hear about it right away."

During the next week Petrella had little to do except wait. Even ordinary criminal business seemed to be slackening off a

little. No doubt, this is why he found time, more than once, to visit the Probation Office at Kennington.

Miss Postance reported that Billy and Alec were continuing to behave like model citizens, spending their days in continual if unsuccessful efforts to get work; following her advice about how to spend their leisure, what books to read, and what films to see.

"Would you believe it," she said, "they'd never been to a Walt Disney film before. They told me they both wept bucketfuls over *Old Yeller*. So I struck while the iron was hot, and gave them *Black Beauty* to read. They're halfway through it now."

"Splendid," said Petrella. "And they report here regularly?"

"More than that. The rules say twice a week, but Billy has been here—oh—I think, almost every day."

"Billy is the taller, darker one?"

"Yes." Miss Postance hesitated. She was never quite sure whether Inspector Patrick Petrella was laughing at her or not. But his face looked quite guileless. "As a matter of fact, I think he's rather sweet. Yesterday he brought me a present."

"He *what?*"

"Oh, nothing valuable." She opened the drawer of her desk and brought out a card. It was an elaborate oldfashioned Valentine, the cover depicting in contrasting colours two birds fluttering in the air, each holding in its beak one end of a twining ribbon.

"Very tasteful," said Petrella. He read the inscription, in Gothic lettering, slowly. By the time he had finished, he had got his breath back, and was able to say, almost without a tremor, "Do you think he's quite old enough for this sort of thing?"

"He's young for his age in some ways," agreed Miss Postance. "Not in others."

"Would it be part of your duties to give him some elementary instruction in—well—you know what I mean."

He gazed fixedly at the birds.

"Certainly not," said Miss Postance. "I don't believe that any boy could grow up in South London without knowing *all* the facts of life."

Petrella was inclined to agree with her.

It was that afternoon that the call came through, from the Flanders Lane branch of the London and Home Counties Bank.

Petrella said, "I'll come round as soon as it's dark. I shall be on foot. Can you let me in at the side door?"

He found the manager and one of his cashiers, a pleasant young man called Hopkins, waiting for him.

"You tell him," said the manager.

"It's the man at the back, Mr. Clissold. He's a retired police sergeant."

"What's *he* up to?"

"He's not up to anything. We keep tabs on all our neighbours. Just as a precaution. I was talking to him this afternoon, and he said that yesterday evening he caught a boy fooling round in his backyard. He kicked him out and didn't think a lot about it."

"But you were worried," said Petrella.

"What I didn't like was that there's a window—it's barred, of course—from our boiler-room, opening on to his yard. I showed Clissold the photograph and he's pretty sure that the boy was one of them."

"Splendid," said Petrella.

"The only thing is," said the manager, "that I don't quite see how anyone could cut through these bars. Clissold's bedroom looks right over them. If there was any noise, he'd hear it. And the bars are much too close for anyone to slip through."

"I know someone who might," said Petrella . . .

It was two nights later when the attack went in. Petrella had a grandstand view of it from Mr. Clissold's bedroom window. The organisation was admirable. Two shadows slipped over the wall, drifted across the yard, paused for a moment at the boiler-room window, and appeared to be doing something to the bars.

"Greasing 'em," said Sergeant Morris.

Then one figure stooped. The other, and slighter, jumped on to the first one's back. There was a very slight slurring sound.

"He's in," said Petrella. "Action stations. We don't want any slip-ups now."

There were no slip-ups . . .

The following afternoon, Superintendent Benjamin finished reading Petrella's report and said, "Defending Counsel's going to have a tough job getting this little lot off. Four of them in the vault with explosive and detonators. One in a car outside with further explosive, ropes, and sacks."

"*And* the car a stolen one."

"Burton and Cox were the men who handled the explosive. Samuels was the driver and—what do you think the two Thomases were? Just stooges?"

"On the contrary," said Petrella. "I think, when we've worked it all out, we shall find that Billy Thomas—whose real name, incidentally, is Andrei Kiffer—was bossing the whole outfit."

"A boy of that age?"

"Appearances are deceptive. He's over twenty-one. More probably between twenty-five and thirty. That was the estimate

of his barber. It's difficult to deceive the man who cuts your hair."

"I see," said Benjamin. "And the so-called uncle?"

"That was Samuels, who did the driving. Burton and Cox were hired for the job."

"And Billy's brother. Was he—?"

"Alec is badly on our conscience," said Petrella. "I guessed she was a girl. Something in the way she moved. What I didn't know was that she was married to Billy."

"But why is she on your conscience?" said Benjamin.

"I was wondering," said Petrella, "how I could possibly explain it all to Miss Postance."

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W FOR A BOB

They're off! And whether you're a flier over fences or a member of the Macadam Brigade, tackle these teasers for the tote double. Left at the gate? Then gallop ventre à terre for page 91

1. *How much would it cost to shoe a horse with* 32 *nails, beginning at* $\frac{1}{4}$*d. and doubling for each successive nail?*
2. *Which famous jockey in* 1953 *rode twelve consecutive winning mounts?*
3. *Can you identify the owners of these well-known racing colours?*
   a. Purple; gold braid, scarlet sleeves, black cap with gold fringe;
   b. Black; white cap;
   c. Pink; chocolate sleeves and cap.
4. *Whose mount was blessed with "a mouth like a bell and a heart of hell And a head like a gallows-tree"?*
5. *Where is the famous White Horse Inn?*
6. *Old Billy, a draughthorse who died in* 1822, *is alleged to be the oldest horse that ever lived. Can you guess his approximate age?*
7. *Can you identify: i. a bullfinch;*
   ii. a double oxer;
   iii. a tiger trap;
   iv. Helsinki Steps?
8. *Can you team up these famous riders and horses: Nizefella; Pat Smythe; Foxhunter; The Duke of Wellington; Prince Hal; Wilf White; Copenhagen; Colonel Harry Llewellyn?*

Water Party

The barge she sat in, like a burnish'd throne
Burn'd on the water . . .

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE, *Antony and Cleopatra*

At this moment a galley drifting slowly down stream got entangled for an instant in their ropes: for, the river turning suddenly, they had shot out into the stream; and this galley came between them and the bank. In it a lady of great beauty was seated under a canopy with gallants and dependents standing behind her . . . It was the Princess Claelia.

CHARLES READE, *The Cloister and the Hearth*

Boat Song

Like crimson arrows from a quiver
The red rays pierce the waters flowing
While we go dreaming, singing, rowing,
To Leudemanns-on-the-River . . .

In all the glad blithe world, oh, never
Were hearts more free from care than when
We wandered through those walks, we ten
By Leudemanns-on-the-River.

ELLA WHEELER WILCOX, *Leudemanns-on-the-River*

Gilded Barge

An awe-struck "Oh!" went up from the girls at the sight of the carved and gilded barge, monstrous, magnificent, under its scarlet awning. Many people were already on board, walking slowly to and fro, their satins and jewels glowing with a fiery

splendour in the hot red shadow of the awning . . . Julia danced with the young gentleman who had formed "a detached Party" with her to feed the gazelles in the park, and she danced with him two, three, four, yes, five times. He was a charming youth whose dark, ardent eyes spoke his admiration boldly—too boldly—but that was tempered by his shy, almost deprecating smile.

MARGARET IRWIN, *Still She Wished for Company*

Boat-Race Blues

When blue blades flash past on the river,
Then anxious are blue-bedight girls:
In bosoms forget-me-nots shiver
And violets nestle in curls!
They breathlessly wait for the crisis—
As boats hurry fast to the mark—
Will Cam throw a pallor on Isis?
Or tears turn light ribbons to dark?

Then pull for the pride of the river—
For tiny cerulean glove,
For droplets of turquoise that quiver
In ears of the girl that you love;
For the lazuli bracelet that presses
The wrist of your own little pet,
For glory of azure-twined tresses—
Pull hard for the blonde and brunette!

J. ASHBY-STERRY, *In a Balcony at Barnet*, 1876

Winning Stroke

His blade struck the water a full second before any other . . . until as the boats began to near the winning-post, his own was dipping into the water *twice* as often as any other.

DESMOND F. T. COKE, *Sandford of Merton*

Water Music

Williams is captain, and we drive along in this delightful bay in the evening wind under the summer moon until earth appears another world. Jane brings her guitar, and if the past and future could be obliterated, the present would content me so well that I could say with Faust to the passing moment, " Remain, thou art so beautiful."

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY, *Letter*, 1822

Regatta

Neptune sate in his Chariot High
Drawn by Six Hippopotami . . .

T. HEYRICK, *The Submarine Voyage*, 1691

Yachting Manners

When we arrived at Greenwich we found the Piazza before the hospital open to receive the carriages, & a smart boat to convey us on Board the Yacht . . . We then made acquaintance with Augustus Craven, the owner of the Yacht, who is tall, dark, & interesting, with a very pretty figure and *thoroughbred* manners. The party was composed of the nicest people as Mr. Craven said he could only have the prettiest girls in London. Mountain had engaged himself to skull the Farquhars down, & therefore they arrived very late, & their *rower* a great figure. Everyone laughed at them . . .

When the daylight closed in, the Vessel was illuminated with coloured lamps which formed the initials of "Louisa Craven." The first Quadrille we danced without gentlemen, & laughed like *des Folles*. Augustus Craven placed himself by my side for the whole evening & although he hates dancing he would dance 2 Quadrilles with me. A *sudden impulse* made me form a favourable opinion of him.

GEORGINA SMYTHE, *Journal, June* 30, 1827

MISTER DEATH AND THE REDHEAD

She saddled up her pinto pony
and took out after him

BY HELEN EUSTIS

MISTER DEATH come aridin' in from the plains on his pale stallion, ashootin' off his pistols, bangety-bang-bang, till you'd 'a' thought some likkered-up Injun was on a spree. Hoo-ee! We was scared, all us little uns, and the grown folks, too, only to them he seemed more familiar.

But he never touched nary a soul that day but Billy-be-damn Bangtry, the one the girls was all crazy for. An' Mister Death no more'n just laid a finger on him, so he didn't die right off, but lay there cold and sweatin', dyin' of a bullet in his belly which was shot off by a drunken cowpoke in a wild euchre game.

Now, many a girl in our town wet the pillow with her tears when she heard how young Billy was like to die, for he was a handsome man and drove all women wild; but the one that cried and carried on the worst was pretty little Maude Applegate with the freckles and the red hair.

Old Injun Mary was anursin' Billy with poultices and healin' herbs and wouldn't let no other woman near his door, so there wasn't nary a thing Maude Applegate could do for him.

But you can't expect a redheaded woman to jest sit around and fret, like you would another colour girl, an' Maude was no exception to that rule. Though she cried and carried on for a while, she pretty soon decided something had to be done, so she dried her eyes on her pettishirt, saddled up her daddy's pinto pony, and took out across the plains after Mister Death.

Maude Applegate, she rode high and she rode low; she rode through the cow country into the sheep country; through the sheep country into the Injun country; through the Injun country to the far mountains, and there at last she caught up with Mister Death, jest about a mile down the trail from the little ole shack where he lived with his granny, up above the timber line.

When Maude Applegate spied his pale stallion, she was mighty tired and mighty weary; her red hair was all tumbled down her

back, and her daddy's pinto wasn't no more'n skin and bone.

But she caught her breath and sang out loud, " Oh, wait up, Mister Death! Wait up for me! "

Mister Death, he pulled up his pale stallion and looked around, surprised-like, for there isn't many that call out to halt him.

" Why, what do you want, missy? " he asked Maude Applegate as she rode up alongside. " Jumpin' Jehoshaphat, if you don't look like you rode clean through the brier patch! "

" Oh, Mister Death," Maude panted out, " I rode high and I rode low after you! I rode through cow country into sheep country; through sheep country into Injun country; through Injun country to the far mountains, and all to ask you would you spare Billy-be-damn Bangtry, my own true love! "

At that, Mister Death throwed back his head so's his black sombrero slipped off and hung around his neck by the strings, and he laughed loud. " Now ain't that cute! " said Mister Death. " Honey, you're jest about the cutest thing I'm likely to see! "

But Maude Applegate, she'd rode high and she'd rode low, she'd stood thirst and she'd stood hunger, she'd like to killed her daddy's pretty little pinto; furthermore, she was a redheaded woman, and she wasn't goin' to be laughed at so.

She took and cussed out Mister Death good. She tole him that where she come from, no gentleman laughed at no lady in her true trouble, and she'd thank him to mind his manners with her, and she'd like to know who brought him up anyhow? Why, she knew dirty nekkid Injun bucks acted better'n him. She'd lay his mammy was aspinnin' in her grave, an' so on.

Well, Mister Death, he sobered down shortly and set up straight in his saddle and listened real still, with only his eyes ablinkin'. When Maude give out of breath, he took out his 'baccy bag, licked a paper, an' rolled him a smoke.

" What'll you give me for Billy-be-damn Bangtry? " said he.

But Maude Applegate, she was really wound up. She tossed her red hair like a pony's mane and made a sassy mouth. " I ain't agonna talk business until I've washed my face and had me a bite to eat," said she. " I've rode high and I've rode low—"

" All right, all right! " said Mister Death. " Ride along now, and I'll take you to my cabin; my ole granny'll take care of you."

So Maude and Mister Death they rode up the slope, Mister Death reinin' in his pale stallion to keep down to the pore tired pinto, until presently they come to a little ole shack with smoke comin' out of the stovepipe. There was Mister Death's granny astandin' in the door, as pleased as Punch to see some company.

" Why, you're right welcome, missy! " she sang out, soon's they were within callin' distance. " The pot's on the stove and

the kettle's abilin'. Come right in and rest yourself a while! "

So they pulled up, and Mister Death swung down off his pale stallion, come around by Maude and lifted her right down to the ground, with his two big hands ameetin' around her little waist.

" Oh, ain't she the purty little thing? " his granny kept asayin' all the while, and hobblin' around the dooryard on her crutch like a bird with a broken wing. Then she taken Maude inside and give her warm water, and a ivory comb, and a pretty white silk wrapper from out of her ole brass-bound chest, and when Mister Death come in from seein' to the hosses, there's Maude Applegate asettin' like a redheaded angel, drinkin' tea.

Maude, she perked up soon's she got some vittles inside her, and presently she had Mister Death and his granny laughin' fit to bust with her comical tales of the folks back home.

Soon Mister Death, he set in to yawnin' and gapin', " I've rode a far piece today," he said to his granny. " I been twice around the world and back, and I think I'll lay my head in your lap and catch forty winks." And shortly he was asnorin'.

Then Death's granny begun to talk low to Maude Applegate, questionin' her all about herself, and where she come from, and why she come. So Maude tole her all about how Billy-be-damn Bangtry, her own true love, lay adyin' of a bullet in his belly, so what could she do but take out after Mister Death to beg him to stay his hand? When Death's granny had heard the whole story, she fetched a great sigh.

" Well," she said, " it's a great pity to me you got your heart set, for you're like the girl I once was, and if I had my way, you're the girl I'd choose for my grandson to marry, for I'm ole and tired and would like to see him settled before I go to my rest. You're young, and you're purty, and you don't stand for no sass; and if my ole eyes don't deceive me, you can do a bit of witchin' too. Now ain't that true? "

" Well," Maude answered her modestly, " jest a little of the plain."

" Like what now? " said Death's granny. " White or black? "

" Little o' both," said Maude. " Witched my little brother into passin' his arithmetic, and I also witched the preacher's wife so she tripped on her shoestring and fell in the horse trough."

Once more Death's granny fetched a sigh. " That's a good start for a young un," said she. " Don't look to me like a girl like you ought to waste herself on no drunken gamblin' cowhand gets hisself shot up in some fool card game. Howsomever, if you got your heart set, I'll help you. Whenever Death catnaps this way, he shortly begins to talk in his sleep, and when he talks, he'll answer three questions truly, and then wake up.

"What shall I ask him for you?"

"Ask him," said Maude right away, "what is his price to let off Billy-be-damn Bangtry."

"That's one," said Death's granny. "You got three questions. What else?"

At this, Maude had to think, and presently she said, "Ask him why he took my baby sister from her cradle."

"Very well, chile," said Granny. "And one more."

Then Maude Applegate bent her red head near to the red fire and was still, but at last she said, kinda low and slow, "Ask him what he does when he's lonesome."

To this Death's granny answered nothing at all, and so they set in quiet until shortly Death begun to mumble in his sleep. Then his granny took ahold of a lock of his coal-black hair and tweaked it, gentle-like.

"Yes?" Death said, but without wakin' up. "Yes?"

"Tell me, son," Death's granny said, bendin' over his ear. "What will you take to let off Billy-be-damn Bangtry?"

At this, Death twitched and turned in his sleep. "Oh, Granny," he said, "she's such a pretty girl! If it was some, I'd make it an eye. An' if it was others, I'd make it ten years o' life. But for her, I'll make it that she must ride with me two times around the world and give me a kiss on the lips."

At this, Maude drawed a great deep breath and leaned back in her chair.

"Well, son," said granny, "here's another question she asks of you. Why did you take her baby sister from the cradle?"

Then Death twisted and turned in his sleep again. "She was sick," he said. "She was full of pain. I took her so she need never cry no more."

At this, Maude bowed her head and hid her cheek in her hand.

"Well, son," said Death's granny, "an' here's the last. What is it you do when you're lonesome?"

At this, Death give a regular heave and a great groan, and turned his face from the light of the fire. For a long time he whispered and mumbled, and finally he said real low, "I peep through the windows at how the human bein's sleep in each other's arms."

And with this last, he woke up with a jerk, give a mighty yawn, sayin', "My stars, I must of dropped off!"

Now Mister Death and his granny was cheerful folks in spite o' his profession, and that evenin' they gave Maude Applegate such a high ole time that she was almost glad she come. Death's granny, she tole some mighty edifyin' stories about her young days, and furthermore, she got out a jug of her blackberry wine,

and Death, he played such merry tunes on his fiddle that Maude Applegate got right out of her chair, picked up her skirts, and danced. It was late that night when Death's granny showed Maude to the little trundle bed all made up fresh beside her own four-poster.

In the mornin', Death's granny had Maude's own dress all mended and pressed for her, and a fine breakfast of coffee and ham and grits to stay their stomachs for their long trip, and when Mister Death brought round his pale stallion, all saddled and bridled to go, the tears was standin' in his granny's eyes as she kissed Maude Applegate good-bye.

"Good-bye," Maude said. "I thank you for your fine hospitality, and if it wasn't for Billy-be-damn Bangtry, my own true love, I'd be right sorry to go."

Mister Death, he lifted Maude up to his big stallion and leapt astride; then away they rode, right up the snowy mountaintop into the sky, and Maude Applegate was surprised to find herself warm and comfortable, ridin' pillion with her arms wrapped around Mister Death's waist.

Then didn't they have a ride! Mister Death, he rode his pale stallion up the mountains of the storm to the pastures of the sky, where the little clouds was grazin' beside their big fat white mammies, and the big black daddy clouds kept watch around the edge. And he rode right up in the fields where the stars grow, and let Maude Applegate pluck a few to wear in her red hair.

He rode past the moon, and when Maude Applegate reached out and touched it, it was cold as snow, and slippery too. They couldn't go too near the sun, Mister Death said, lest they might get burnt.

But Mister Death, he had his business to tend to, so pretty soon they set out across the wide ocean on their way to twice around the world.

Mister Death, he wrapped Maude in his cloak of invisibility, and he took her to all sorts of houses in all sorts of climes—houses where Chinee folks lived, and Rooshian, and Japanee, and African, and folks that never spoke a word of English since the day they was born. He showed her castles and dirty little huts the like of which she never seen in all the state of Texas, he showed her kings and princes and poor folks and all, and maybe she didn't just open her eyes!

But in one respect she noticed they was all alike: when Mister Death come, the living couldn't see him, and wept and wailed, but the folks that was dyin' rose up to greet him, and smiled at him on their way, like they knew him for a friend. She was right glad to see that everybody didn't take him for such a bad fellow

after all. While they rode, Mister Death, he tole Maude Applegate many a pretty tale about his far travels, and it was plain to see he was a man knew more'n likker and women and ridin' herd.

And when they was on their last lap around and on their way home, Mister Death, he rode out over the ocean and showed Maude Applegate where the whales played—she saw 'em just as plain, aploughin' through the clear green water like a herd of buffalo on a grassy plain. And he rode over the North Pole for her to see the polar bears, which was all white but for their noses, and he showed her the crocodiles of Egypt driftin' down the Nile, and the tigers of India, too, and every strange creature with his mate. And at last Maude Applegate couldn't help feeling sorry for Mister Death, that he was the only one who had to be alone in all the whole wide world.

But at last they were lopin' back over the plain toward our town; they seen the smoke arisin' from the stovepipes and chimleys into the pale blue sky; they rode right down the main street past Tarbell's Emporium, past the Wells Fargo office, and reined up before the Blue Bird Saloon.

"Why, what you pullin' up here for?" Maude Applegate asked of Mister Death, feelin' surprised.

But Mister Death only answered, "Ne'mind; you'll see," and swung down out of the saddle.

Then he reached up and lifted Maude down from off his pale stallion, and he wrapped her once more in his cloak of invisibility; and he said to her, "Now fer the rest of the bargain."

So Maude stood there with her eyes shut, kinda stiff, and steelin' herself for his kiss, but nothin' happened at all, so she opened 'em again, and Mister Death said to her, "No, Maude, the bargain was that you was to kiss me."

So Maude, she was obliged to ask Mister Death to lean down his head, which he did, and she was obliged to reach up and put her mouth on his. Now maybe she thought it would be cold, and maybe she thought it would be fearful to kiss Mister Death—I don't know, I'm sure—but it surely come as a great surprise to her when she found her two arms around his neck without her knowin' how they got there, and her own two lips on his. And the truth of the matter is, it was Mister Death stepped away the first, and tole her, soft and low, "Run along now, Maude. Billy-be-damn Bangtry, your own true love, is settin' right in there in the Blue Bird Saloon."

Then Mister Death unwrapped her from his cloak of invisibility, so's she couldn't see him no more—only hear his spurs jinglin' as he walked away—and Maude Applegate was left standin' by herself before the Blue Bird Saloon, where, inside the window,

she could see Billy-be-damn Bangtry, her own true love, settin' at a table drinkin' whisky with a bunch of fly young women of a kind doesn't mind settin' in saloons. Oh, then Maude Applegate's bosom was so full of a thousand feelin's she thought she would bust, and she didn't know whether what she wanted most was to wrench up the hitchin' rail, bust into the Blue Bird Saloon and lambaste her own true love, or whether she'd simply like to melt of shame and sink through the ground.

Then she noticed that her daddy's pinto, all groomed and saddled, was tied up by the Blue Bird door. She was jest about decided to mount him and gallop off home before anybody seen her, when Billy-be-damn Bangtry caught a sight of her through the window, and come pushin' out the swingin' doors, swaggerin' and hitchin' his pants like he'd never been half dead in his life.

"Why," he sings out, "if it ain't little Maude Applegate waitin' for me outside the Blue Bird Saloon! Where you been, honey? Heared you was away."

Maude Applegate, she felt the red comin' up in her face. She snapped back at him, "Heared you was mighty sick."

"Mighty sick," Billy said, shakin' his head. "Mighty sick and like to die, but ole Injun Mary, she doctored me good as new with her poultices and herbs!"

Now this was the last straw to Maude Applegate. She'd rode high and she'd rode low; she'd rode through cow country to sheep country; through sheep country to Injun country; through Injun country to the far mountains, all to stay the hand of Mister Death from taking Billy-be-damn Bangtry, her own true love; she'd rode twice around the world and back and give a kiss on the lips to a strange man, and all to save a feller which turned out to be this horse-smellin', whisky-breathin', tobaccer-chewin', loose-livin', gamblin', no-good cowhand standin' here lookin' at her like she was a ripe peach an' all he had to do was shake the tree. Maude Applegate was so mad she could of cried; but she didn't do no such of a thing, since she was a redheaded woman, and besides, somethin' better come to her mind.

Just then she seen ole Pap Tarbell lean outen the upstairs winder of Tarbell's Emporium, and Maude, she took and witched a spell. When Pap let fly with his tobaccer juice, Maude, she witched it straight into Billy-be-damn Bangtry's eye.

And while he was still standin' there acursin' and aswearin' in such language as no lady cares to hear, Maude unhitched her daddy's little pinto pony and leapt astride. She dug in her heels and set the dust aflyin' as she galloped down the street out of town. She rode through cow country into sheep country, through sheep country into Injun country, through Injun

country to the far mountains, until she caught sight of Mister Death on his pale stallion.

Then she sung out, "Oh, wait up, Mister Death! Wait up for me!"

And when Mister Death heard her he turned and rode back down the trail—though he is one who turns back for no man—and he snatched her off her little pinto and on to his pale stallion. He held her close and he kissed her good, and pretty soon he said, "I guess Granny'll be mighty proud to see you."

And Maude Applegate said to him, "Jest don't let me hear no talk about peepin' through folks' windows never no more."

Now Maude Applegate she lived long and happy with Mister Death, and from all I hear, she's with him yet. Fact is, she took to helpin' him with his work, and when we was little uns, and cross at bedtime, and startin' to cry, our mammies 'd tell us, "Hush, now, honey, close your eyes, and pretty soon Maude Applegate'll sit by your bed and sing you a lullaby."

And she used to, too. Heard her myself.

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FOR LOVE OF DENISE

They would ask in French—
just to see the gleam of laughter in her eyes

BY P. B. HUGHES

THIS was the Patisserie Beaulieu. It stood here on the east side of Metcalfe Street, facing Dominion Square. On this spot Beaulieu's famous cakes were produced. That is, they were made here. Things were not produced in those days, and did not possess the perfection and the uniformity we associate with production. Yet they were sought after by the rich because they were the best in Montreal, and Beaulieu prospered.

That Beaulieu was a tyrant. Tyranny was a characteristic of master tradesmen in unenlightened days. Such men, having endured much in their acquisition of skill and capital, became very great in their own eyes, and their employees were not permitted to forget it.

He could bow and scrape before his customers. He could bark and bellow at his own people. There was nothing admirable about Beaulieu except the sublimity of his conviction that the bodies and souls of those who worked for him were his to rule over. There he was, fat and unctuous, strong and peremptory, fearing God and not much else, and in this last we do find some little cause for admiration, we who fear God not at all and are beset with fears.

Of course, he knew as little about managing a business as he did about personnel techniques. Nevertheless, he was shrewd enough to place Denise Lalande at the counter under the central chandelier of gaslights, for there was nothing that shone in all that shopful of gilt and marble and glass and sugar-frosting so brightly as Denise Lalande. She was eighteen that spring, or maybe turned nineteen, the Easter season of the dreadful events that must be told.

Young men with money in their pockets, and some not young, used to come into the shop for the pleasure of seeing her smile. The most obdurate of the English-speaking would ask for their half dozen of petits fours in French just to see the gleam of

laughter in her eyes, knowing that it was not mockery but sweetness and fun, so that they laughed, too, as she corrected them prettily. And a merry music played in the bronze cash register of Beaulieu.

It would be less than just to say that Beaulieu viewed with distaste the courtship of Denise Lalande by a young Swiss named Malther, solely on account of the diminution of profit it portended. The fact is that Malther was an artist, young, occasionally a roisterer in taverns, and quite unpossessed of land or money in the bank. To Beaulieu, fine flower of the age of Victoria, such a man was not an eligible suitor; that he should pay court to a young woman under his jurisdiction was an affront.

Unfortunately it was not a simple matter. Malther was also, from time to time, an employee of Beaulieu. His was the unknown hand by which the finest of Beaulieu's cakes were embellished. The masterpieces of the patisserie, the costliest of the Christmas and the Easter and the wedding cakes, the custom-made, the bespoke—for these Malther was summoned, and the beauty of the workmanship was not surpassed, either in New York or Paris itself.

It was unfortunate because, as affairs stood this Easter, Beaulieu was faced with the prospect of losing Denise to Malther if he withdrew his veto on the marriage, or with the unpleasant alternative of losing Malther to distant parts if he did not.

"We will discuss the matter when the Easter is over, monsieur," was the best the old fox could do to protect his immediate interest when Malther delivered his ultimatum pertaining to distant parts. "Now there is the business to see to.

"For Saturday delivery there are eight cakes of a speciality for which I require your talent. It is necessary that you come to the atelier tomorrow, Good Friday, after the hour of the Adoration. The cakes will await you with the base coat applied, as usual. Ten dollars, monsieur, for the lot. I doubt if ever such a price was paid, but then, I expect of you a work such as has never been executed. I myself will admit you. Entendu?"

"Oui, monsieur, c'est entendu." And the unhappy Malther, well aware that the great man had merely postponed an adverse judgment until a time more convenient to himself, left the presence.

On his way through the shop he saw Denise, momentarily disengaged. "Dearest one," he whispered, leaning over the plate glass, "this Beaulieu is a monster. He has no right to say we shall not marry. You must tell him it is no business of his, and tell me that I am to be the happiest of men."

Never sparkled jewel so bright as the tear on Denise's cheek. "Oh, Ernest," she whispered back, "I dare not. We cannot do what M. Beaulieu says we cannot. We must wait. Oh, Ernest, do not speak so."

But Malther had spoken so. He had uttered a malediction upon the head of the confectioner. This he repeated with emphasis and relish, after which he took himself angrily from the shop.

The next afternoon was dark with impending storm. Young Malther was sullen and dejected. Only in the sadness of the Adoration of Good Friday did his anger subside; he sang the responses to the *Ecce Lignum Crucis* and was lost in the music; he sang second cantor in the *Populo Meus*, and his own sorrow was forgotten for the moment in that great cry of sorrow. He had a gift for liturgical chant. All this is significant in view of what was to happen.

In the crowd pouring out of the cathedral into Dorchester Street, already dark, he encountered Beaulieu, and the two of them crossed to the curtained shop. They entered, walked past the shrouded piles of more ordinary merchandise ready for the next day, and mounted the stairs to the workroom which Beaulieu called the atelier, or studio. This was a long room overlooking the street, in which electric light had been installed, with great yellow filaments.

Through the windows, the cold, blue light of a street lamp shone and winked off and on as the electrodes clattered and reset themselves. Wet snow was falling. You could not see the far side of Dominion Square. Malther was alone with his enemy in the chilly, silent shop.

Beaulieu gave his instructions, but Malther was not attentive. "This," said the master confectioner, indicating a cake the size of a dishpan, "is for the Saint James' Club. Here is the badge. It is to be done in blue. And you must have a rooster. The Easter touch. See . . ."

He held the drawing of the badge in one hand while he sketched in mid air with the other, expressing the concept of design succinctly, depending upon the artist's understanding—like old Julius maybe, with Michelangelo, outlining the Creation.

"And this is for the family of M. le Maire. The arms of the city. And—let me see—for this, the bunny rabbits. That is the best Easter motif, I think."

"Bunny rabbits!" said Malther. His hands moved unconsciously, in phase with a turbulence of spirit that possessed him. "Bunny rabbits!"

Bitterness, rebellion, hate of the fat Beaulieu, a sense of the

indignity of modelling bunny rabbits, the urge to work, the urge to kill, and a great desire to shout were upon Malther all at once.

" Monsieur? " questioned Beaulieu.

" It is nothing," said Malther coldly.

So Beaulieu went on with his explanations, and at last took his departure.

" I will return at ten," he said. Then added importantly, " My brother-in-law, the Abbé Tranchemontagne, dines at my house tonight."

" Bon appétit," said Malther between his teeth.

The young artist heard the heavy footsteps moving down the stairs and across the shop. The street door opened and closed, and the key grated in the lock. Then he was alone with the arc light winking at him through a myriad of bluish snowflakes. He was alone with the prospect of the bunny rabbits, alone to brood upon and contemplate his grudge against Beaulieu—who was to return late at night.

In those days brandy was used in the better sugar pastes, just as eggs and butter and other old-fashioned comestibles reinforced the substance of the cake. The wonderful products of chemical industry which have replaced these things were not then available, nor had the taste of the consumer been refined to a liking for the bland and innocuous flavours of our advanced civilisation. There were, therefore, several bottles of cognac, of a quality in keeping with the high-class trade for which he catered, on the shelves of Beaulieu's atelier.

And on this Good Friday night, Malther, he of the yearnings of love, of the liturgical music, of the stormy urge to express what was in his heart, be it by creative art or by mayhem upon his employer's person, commenced his labours and from time to time refreshed himself by pouring a dram of the strong liquor down his own throat.

The Abbé Tranchemontagne had his quarters in the Archbishop's Palace, a dingy red-brick structure south of the cathedral. In consequence, he accompanied Beaulieu, about half past ten, on a diagonal path across the square, the two of them pushing their way through several inches of slushy snow, heads bent, their hats and shoulders white.

Beaulieu had consumed a bottle of port, to the abbé's one meagre glass, and he was in an expansive mood.

" Come in with me, my friend," he said. " Ah, but you will see a fine young artist's work here. There will be no Easter cakes in Montreal the equal of these."

So it was that Beaulieu had a companion when he arrived at the

door of the atelier. The door was locked on the inside. Movements could be heard within.

"Open, M. Malther," shouted the confectioner jovially. "I have a guest. We wish to see what I have described to him as superb beyond belief."

The sounds ceased. "Go away." It was Malther's voice, but it was incredible to Beaulieu that he should be so addressed by one of his people in his own shop.

"Who is it that speaks? Who is that? What do you say? Open the door at once!"

"Go away! It is I, Malther."

At this, the irate Beaulieu seized the handle of the door and shook it so violently that the very fabric of the building was imperilled. Only the restraining hand of the abbé stopped him.

"Beaulieu," said Malther in an ominously quiet voice, when the rattling had ceased, "I am about to sing a song. When I have finished, I may find myself in the mood to reduce these cakes, superb beyond belief as they may be, to ruins.

"But, if you attempt to force that door, I assure you I shall not await the proper mood but will destroy them forthwith. You are a bully, sir, and a wicked, fat, grasping old man. Now go away."

"He is mad," whispered Beaulieu to the abbé.

"Or drunk?" suggested the abbé, whose austere features were belied by a twinkle of amusement in the eyes, which would have shocked both men if they had been aware of it.

"What shall I do? If the cakes are spoilt, I am ruined."

"Hm-m-m," said the abbé speculatively. "He has a wife perhaps?"

Beaulieu shook his head.

"Or a—a sweetheart?"

"Ha! It is an idea. She lives with her aunt, the widow Huot, in the Rue Lagauchetière. Come, we will get a sleigh. It is a hope . . ."

It was almost midnight when the little party of priest and confectioner and the young girl was driven up to the shop in a flurry of snow and music of sleigh bells.

Denise, a little terrified by this extraordinary summons and quite overawed by the august company in which she found herself, had nevertheless to assume the principal role under the direction of the abbé, who had taken over generalship after the initial defeat of Beaulieu.

"Speak now, mademoiselle, I pray you," whispered the abbé, when they had climbed the stairs and stood outside the locked

door. "It is not a deceit," he added reassuringly. "It is only that he may listen to reason."

In a low voice, but firmly, Denise spoke. "Ernest? It is I, Denise. Will you not open the door?"

Movements from within, previously audible, ceased, while the three outside the door waited. But the movements within the brain of Malther had not ceased. There was a silence; then his footsteps could be heard approaching the door.

Beaulieu nodded eagerly to the abbé, satisfaction upon his features. It was short-lived.

"But certainly, little one," came the words of this reprehensible workman. "Since Papa Beaulieu has brought you here, I assume he has relented, and proposes no doubt to give his blessing to our marriage."

"Eh!" gasped Beaulieu. "Papa Beaulieu will enter, sir, and thrash you within an inch of your life. This is not mere insolence. It is blackmail."

The footsteps retreated unhurriedly. Then there was a sound difficult to describe, as if some soft substance had been deposited violently on the floor.

Poor Beaulieu winced. Tears started from his eyes.

"There remain seven, M. Beaulieu. Perhaps you will think again."

At this point the abbé silenced Beaulieu, perhaps in the nick of time, by raising his hand authoritatively. "Let us do nothing for three minutes," he cried, negotiating a truce. "Mademoiselle, come with me. Stay here, Beaulieu."

And he gently placed the girl's hand on his arm and led her a little way along the corridor.

Whatever was said between them was brief, but it seems to have satisfied both, for there was something of her accustomed gaiety in Denise's look again. The abbé, too, was smiling as they returned to the scene of battle.

"Why not, Beaulieu?" whispered the abbé. "There is no doubt they will marry anyway. They are in love. Is it not you, perhaps, who have driven the young man to this extremity?"

"Never!" shouted Beaulieu. "That I should be threatened and ordered about on my own premises, I, Beaulieu—" His voice died in his throat.

A hideous smack assailed their ears, a sound all too suggestive of spattering confectionery.

"There are yet six, monsieur," announced Malther relentlessly.

"Villain! Villain! Villain!" cried the vanquished tradesman. "Marry her if you will, but desist from the murder of my

livelihood. Mademoiselle, ask him to whom you are now betrothed to open the door, and blame me not in the future that you are a rascal's wife."

Denise did not have to make the request. The bolt was thrown back, and the door swung open.

Like a mother elephant to her young, Beaulieu charged in, quite forgetting the precedence due to church or lady. The abbé followed, while Malther and Denise disappeared together into the shadows.

The eight cakes lay on the workbench under the electric lights, surrounded by the litter incidental to the final stages of their manufacture, this litter including two bowls of soft paste emptied upon the floor and the telltale brandy bottle from which had sprung the roaring lion and the cunning fox that had successively possessed our young artist and lover.

But Beaulieu had seen only the first of the cakes when his agonised cry rose again. Whatever he saw, it was too much. He sat down upon a stool and buried his face in his hands.

"Abbé," he said presently, "never, never employ an artist for a tradesman's work. Remember Beaulieu and the destruction of his business."

The priest was gazing spellbound. "Destruction?" he said. "You call this destruction? Come, look again."

Sadly the confectioner rose and examined the cakes in a wary, cursory manner. He went from one to another of the glittering edifices with the tears of vexation still on his cheeks. Then he turned to the abbé and shrugged his shoulders. "What is all this to me? It is beautiful. Perhaps it is more beautiful than anything ever done in such a medium." His voice rose to a shout.

"But my customers have ordered cakes for Easter, and they do not want beauty; they want Easter cakes. And the Easter cake, it is a cake with eggs and roosters and bunny rabbits! What are these? Ah, these splendid things, they are not what my customers want and have bespoken. Beaulieu is finished. It is the end."

"Is this not, then, an Easter cake?" said the abbé, lost in contemplation. "See, it is a young man sitting upon a stone. It is a young man, and his countenance is as lightning, and his raiment as snow . . . and three women approach; so skilfully is it done that you perceive it, that which cannot be there—the sun, which is now risen. Oh, Beaulieu, Beaulieu. These are Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of James, and Salome, who are come, and the young man speaks to them—see, it is written here in silver. *Surrexit, sicut dixit*—He is risen, as He said."

Now Beaulieu the tradesman was temporarily in abeyance, and the artist in Beaulieu stood in humility before the work of a master hand. Together he and the priest moved through the display, and the bunny rabbits were forgotten. A hush had fallen upon them.

Beaulieu read the mottoes, while the abbé translated the Latin; it was a curious little ceremony, as of prayer and response, as if they trod some via gloriosa, making the stations of the splendour of the Resurrection. *Haec dies*—This is the day which the Lord hath made: let us rejoice and be glad in it. *Christus resurgens*—Christ, rising again from the dead, dieth now no more, alleluia! Death shall no more have dominion over Him, alleluia!

And at each station the little sculptured figures of sugar sang the glory of Easter—angels spread their wings and tiny choirs seemed to raise their voices, and roses blew in pride, and a sad world sprang into sparkling life—and all the bitterness and hunger of young Malther had poured itself out and been sublimated in a tremendous handiwork.

With great solemnity, Beaulieu rummaged out another bottle. "Come," he said, filling four measures, for our hero and Denise had emerged from their colloquy, "it is late. It is nearly two in the morning. Mademoiselle, monsieur, I give you happiness . . . Your health, abbé.

"I am a man who will be in bankruptcy soon, whose customers will go in future elsewhere because their orders have not been filled in the manner they desire. I shall go to my grave in poverty, yet I will remember that the greatest work ever to come from the shop of a confectioner was executed in mine."

"Sir," cried the remorseful Malther, "I will do them again. This very night. By morning they will be ready to deliver, the badge of the club, the arms of the city, the Joyeux Pâques, the bunny rabbits."

But Beaulieu shook his head. "Though they be my undoing, I cannot destroy them."

"I am too poor to wager," said the abbé, "but be assured, my friend, your fame will be redoubled. They to whom these cakes will go will express to you their delight and astonishment. It cannot but be so."

Beaulieu was inconsolable. "I will make a promise," he said; "not a wager, but a promise. To you, my children, I will give a wedding present of one hundred dollars. To you, abbé, I will give a hundred dollars for your poor. All this if these customers are satisfied."

"Oh, M. Beaulieu," sobbed Denise, "I hope it will be so, not for your gift, but—but it would break my heart if you were

harmed because of Ernest and me. Sir, Ernest has promised me tonight to drink no more. Never again will a terrible thing happen like this."

That Denise! Such a pretty girl she was, and so silly, worrying about the welfare of her employer as if it was her own.

And Beaulieu, the old fool, the old despot, comforting the girl with a kiss upon the forehead!' How well it is that the principles of management are a matter of widespread knowledge today, so that there can be no such confusion of interests as that displayed by Denise, no despotisms like that of Beaulieu, no scenes like this kissing upon the forehead! . . .

Easter came. And a few days after, Beaulieu walked into the Archbishop's Palace to see his brother-in-law, the Abbé Tranchemontagne.

" Abbé," he said mournfully, " I bring you a cheque for a hundred dollars."

The priest smiled. " I was right, eh? And the young people have their present to start them out as man and wife? "

Beaulieu nodded. " It is their desire that you should marry them."

" With great pleasure. No doubt it can be arranged. And you will dance at their wedding? "

" Of course. I attend the weddings of my own people. Soon I will have none. My ruin is accomplished."

The abbé looked at the cheque. " I do not understand," he said.

" It is those cakes, of course. I am now considered, on their account, the greatest confectioner in the world by the people of Montreal. Before, I was good; now I am great."

" And this you call ruin? "

" I ask you, reverend. What will be expected of Beaulieu now? For Christmas, say? Next Easter? _Another season comes, and they will look at one another and say, 'Beaulieu is slipping. Remember his work in his better days? ' And the season after, they will look for someone else."

" What Malther has done he can do again, surely? "

" Alas, no, Abbé. Never again. Was he not the prey of love, and of anger—and of cognac brandy? And the little Lalande, how will she ever understand what she has done? 'Ernest has promised me to drink no more.' Pah! He will be fat and contented. Like me, Abbé. What now can I expect of him but—but bunny rabbits? "

Beaulieu was not ruined, of course. He continued to prosper, and Malther embellished his cakes. Little Malthers were born,

beautiful as their mother. To the first of these, the unregenerate Beaulieu appointed himself godfather, naming the infant boy by his own incredible name of Hyacinthe, to the delight of the parents and in face of the mild protest of the Abbé Tranchemontagne. Malther's sculptures came to enjoy a sound ecclesiastical market; his Pietà at the Etoile de la Mer is mentioned in the guidebooks.

Ah, well! The shop stood on the east side of Dominion Square. It was pulled down years ago to make way for an office building. Anyway, Easter cakes are made now by automated processes, bunnies and all, each bunny perfect to the last detail.

There are no more midnight commotions, no more brandy bottles. All is changed—all is improved.

But for me it is only change, and the giants and the fairies are dead.

★ ★ ★

FOR ANGEL CAKE?

Sometimes Great Gran
  Would get a yen
For fresh hens' eggs
  And come back.
(Or so we thought.)
  On those days
The nests at noon
  Still held no eggs
For us.
  The chickens
All of one mind
  Would suddenly
Form a wake
  Across the grass,
As if familiar skirts
  Swept past
With the feed sack.
  Then Gran must have
Cracked her apron
  And they'd scatter.
And on those nights
  Our spavined mare
Would somehow
  Slip her halter
To gallop down
  The pasture
With the moon.

SHIRLEY GUMINA, *Welcome Ghost*

SEED OF FIRE

The prisoner cast a vast shadow against the wall of the woods

BY LAWRENCE LEE

FEAR is too plain a word for what Macreath felt. He was apprehensive, filled with a disquieting anticipation of evil. The blackness of the winter night intensified the uneasy images in his mind.

As though he could see them, he considered the others with whom he was now lost in woods where none of them had ventured before. He had thought that it was a blunder to try to find a way back to the car by going through the woods, but he had not been firm in expressing his doubts.

They seemed a feeble group. There were two exhausted men, one the Judge and the other himself. There were the two tired gundogs which had not eaten since early morning and which now crouched between himself and the Judge, close to the dry trunk of the tree.

And somewhere out there, creeping about in the sightless blackness, was the other figure, the murderer.

"Goddam it!"

The oath was inappropriate to the slight man who had uttered it. Pressed against the tree, crouched evasively in the cold, he was like a disturbed squirrel fussing and twitching. And had not the darkness hidden them, the tension of all of his facial features would have betrayed his uneasiness. The oath was not suitable to his usually self-justifying manner, but in his bitterness and his increasing distrust he had dared to use it to himself.

Goddam it, he thought, the Judge must be soft in the brain to bring one of them out shooting. Trusty! No convict's trusty . . . But I never will understand these people. Only in this part of the country, he thought, would you find a judge taking a paroled murderer on a partridge shoot.

In the blackness he could hear small snapping sounds, as of a person stalking sightlessly through the surrounding woods. Listening more intently, the slight man felt to the right of the place at which he was sitting.

His hand stretched out along the dead trunk with a movement almost of panic, brushing across the rough scaliness of the bark, grasping into the empty air. And then his fingers touched the reassuring coldness of smooth metal.

At any rate—and the thought briefly restored Macreath's depleted confidence—at any rate he hasn't a gun!

And then his courage, like a spark in too heavy a wind, had burnt into a substanceless powder of white ash and was blown away. Not even the gun, now cradled tensely across his lap, kept from him the fear which had succeeded the brief little brightness of arrogance.

"More rested now, Mr. Macreath?" the Judge asked across the darkness.

The Judge had been conscious for a long while of the uneasiness of his companion; he was disturbed to discover that his own morale had been affected by it. Strange fellow, this accountant, Macreath. Not easy to be friendly with him. The Judge wondered where the cause of the strangeness lay. Perhaps in Macreath's meticulous efficiency. And that, he knew, was a prejudiced attitude—the envy of an easygoing people, his own people, whose sometimes careless laxity the Judge acknowledged that he himself shared.

The Judge was about to speak again to the man somewhere near him in the darkness when the sound screeched through the inhuman silence in which only the wind seemed to live.

"Hoo-o-o-o-o-o-o!" And then, explosively, "Hul-lo!"

"What's that?" Macreath asked. He had instinctively raised the gun from his legs.

The cry, as it died across the emptiness of the black winter night, mingling with the soughing and hissing of the trees, evoked the Judge's country boyhood. He recognised it: the natural call of the woods, the long searching flight of the first indeterminable cry and then the abrupt human identification of the "Hul-lo!"

Placing his hands as a shortened trumpet about his mouth, he shouted into the darkness.

"Hul-lo! Hul-lo! This way."

Steps resumed. They thrashed towards the answering voice. They came close and ceased in the proximity of the men and of the dogs crouched in the darkness. There was a crash and clatter of wood, and a cracking sound. For a moment silence succeeded this. Then a deliberate voice, which seemed to communicate the loneliness of one aware of his own isolation, spoke from the void of the blackness.

"I'll build a fire," the voice said, "if I can light a match."

There was nothing unexpected in the words. They declared a familiar and commonplace intention. But in the gusty sightlessness, in the unknown vaults of this forest into which none of them had come before, beneath the mysterious groinings and traceries of the limbs and leaves of unseen aged trees, the words were liturgical: an invocation which had issued throughout time from the heart of man as a cry for warmth and for light.

A match was struck. Its sulphurous flare perished quickly in the suffocating wind. Another hissed its brief glare into the blackness and was extinguished. A third was lighted; and this one burnt, its wavering combustion still uncertain in the bluster of the wind.

Bony, broad, brown hands cupped the match. The small and flagging flame was held beneath a clump of withered leaves still matted upon a dead branch. They caught. There was a seed of fire. Over this in concentrated vigil hung, like a masked face of some race now almost extinguished in the dust of history, the deep-sunk and haunted visage of the prisoner.

He cherished the growing spark as though it was a life, shielding the kindling flame from the wild gusts as best he could with his crouched body and his sheltering spread palms and fingers until it became a multiple larger blaze. It increased, was unified, became one hot glow; and so at last there crackled and burnt in the centre of the hollow a great fire.

Twigs burst with popping sounds, splintered in consuming heat after the desiccating seasons of slow disintegration. Sparks succeeded one another into the momentarily stilled air along the upward twirling currents of pale smoke and were like a line of bubbles released and ascending the darkness among the dimly visible fronds of leaves, towards the far unseen stormy surface of the sky.

The hollow had become a small recessed sanctuary in the vastness of the surrounding dark. Light and warmth radiated, to envelop and disclose all that had paused to seek refuge there—the dogs, the accountant, the Judge. Their now visible shapes were pressed against the bole of a fallen tree which some forgotten earlier storm had blown down, ripping the shallow grip of its roots from the eroded crust of earth in which it had stood.

Only one figure seemed to huddle alone, a form hardly distinguishable beyond the flapping illumination of the large fire which he himself had built.

The Judge turned his face, still pink from the earlier cold, away from the radiance into which he had been looking. His stare, beneath the white line of his brows, seemed to seek across the obscurity the figure seated alone.

"Good work, Tom," the Judge said. "It was colder than charity here. We might have had a bad time if you hadn't built this fire."

There was a short silence. Then the dimmed figure shifted as though restlessly.

"Yes, Judge," the man answered.

The guarded voice and the uncommunicative words seemed to say nothing, to hold the speaker still aloof from these men with guns.

The Judge bent forward, took up a twig, and tossed it into the fire. As he did so, he glanced at Macreath. He saw that Macreath was becoming increasingly uneasy; and the Judge was oppressed by this knowledge. He felt his responsibility in having tried to show friendliness for this man who still seemed so friendless, still so much a stranger. And now he regretted that a day's shooting had ended so badly, that they were stranded on a howling winter night in an unknown forest.

Macreath turned towards the Judge. His rising emotional uneasiness showed in the tautness of his face.

"Well," he asked angrily, "what do we do now?"

As though he was examining his own thoughts, the Judge said a few words between the yawing gusts of the wind.

"We might, of course, try to go on. But," he concluded, "in my opinion it would be a dangerous waste of energy to try to get out of these woods before daylight."

Macreath had sat forward. He had expected a solution to their difficulties. Now he slumped in resignation against the tree. In frustration and impatience he began silently to kick at the earth with the heel of his boot. There was an intensifying animosity in him towards the older man.

"No. There's nothing to be done," the Judge repeated, "nothing but to wait until daylight."

His words were stopped, as though extinguished, by a sudden heavy squall of wind. In the near edges of the woods there was a sound of splintering and a long toppling crash; a limb had been split from some tree and had fallen. The wind roared again. A gust seemed to pounce upon the hollow in which they crouched and to hold them in its fury.

The fire was blown into a flat, spreading corolla of hot embers and ragged outer petals of flame. Smoke filled the comfortless, dank air; and then, as the pressure of the gust lifted, colder air followed, and a thin hurrying shower of small flakes, whiter than the burnt ashes of the wood, fell and hissed upon the coals and stuck damply in melting wetness to the cheeks and necks of the men.

The life in the hollow stirred in uncomfortable apprehension. The prisoner shifted his legs and looked across the fire towards the Judge. The dogs, warm and sleepy against the large log, opened the amber-encircled chestnut of large eyes and turned them, seeking danger, until the questioning whites showed in the renewed flagging of the fire. Macreath, pressed more uneasily against the sheltering bole, was troubled and angry. He was coughing from the smoke.

"Snow!" the Judge said.

The exclamation was addressed to no one. It was an awed comment upon the unusual. Snow did sometimes fall in this area, but not during more than one winter out of ten.

"Snow!" the Judge repeated; and now he seemed to be speaking across the space filled with firelight and darkness and wind to the prisoner. "That puts a different aspect on things."

Into the restored stillness entered the new sound of sifting flakes, the faint dribble of them upon withered leaves, the delicate hiss of the particles falling into the edges of the fire. Then the Judge heard, above these sounds, the slow, calculating, melancholy voice of the prisoner speaking.

"Judge," the voice said, unsoliciting, indifferent. "Judge, if you let me, I'll get us out of these woods."

The Judge looked at the unpleasing figure of Macreath. He was rubbing his eyes violently; and he was coughing again from the smoke. Something about the sight of Macreath seemed to persuade the Judge to consider further.

"We're not too badly off here," he said.

"No, sir," the prisoner commented indifferently. "But I can get us out, if you want."

He did not look at either the Judge or Macreath; his face was blurred with shadow.

"How?" the Judge asked.

Macreath ceased to rub his eyes. He looked quickly at the two men. They were like cautious opponents, debating in guarded calm an issue of great importance. Macreath's pulse quickened. He was imperceptibly alarmed.

"How?" the Judge asked again.

"I don't just know, Judge . . . Find a house. Get somebody to come down here with lanterns and take us out of these woods."

The Judge tried to dismiss from his consideration the uneasy figure of Macreath, the image of which he caught as he looked up at the shape now standing beyond the fire. Whatever he himself might think of the tall lonely man, from whose gaunt body the fire cast a vast shadow against the wall of the woods, he was a prisoner—a paroled criminal in his charge.

"Maybe there's no one living within miles of these woods," he said, less as an answer to the waiting man than as a consideration to be examined closely by himself.

"You let me go and I'll get us out of here. I'll get us out before morning."

The repeated assurance seemed a substitute for all explanation of how the prisoner would accomplish what he promised.

Macreath was watching the Judge, who remained thoughtful and unspeaking. He did not know whether he wished the older man to give the consent or to withhold it. He suspended volition. He had experienced enough emotion through uneasiness and angry frustration; and now he did not wish to make the effort of participation in the decision. The Judge ignored Macreath.

"All right, Tom," the Judge said slowly. "See if you can find somebody to get us out of here."

The prisoner still stood, unmoving, hesitant before the fire.

"I've got to have a gun, Judge," he said.

Without turning to look at Macreath, the Judge knew what he would see in the small feverish blackness of the startled eyes. He did not care to look at the incredulity and fear in Macreath's face; and he hoped that he had not betrayed his own uncertainty.

"Do you need a gun, Tom?" he asked.

"I'm not going into those woods without a gun, Judge," the prisoner said. He did not move, as though he realised that this issue might delay, perhaps annul the success of his plan.

"There's nothing out there that you need a gun for."

The prisoner was silent, looking, as though furtively, over his shoulder at the forest.

"Judge," he said finally, "I'm not going through those woods at night without some sort of gun. Suppose I get lost. How'm I going to let you know?"

There was a long minute of silence. At last, rising, the Judge extended the heavy double-barrelled gun he was carrying. He gave two red cartridges to the prisoner, who had advanced and was now holding the breeched weapon, the barrel grasped in his broad brown left palm, the stock depending below the shadow of his left arm. With the capable, swift, strong fingers of his right hand he inserted the cartridges into the holes of the breeched barrels and sharply closed the gun.

Macreath, watching, half expected the overtowering man to turn and point the loaded weapon at the two men before him. But he did not do so. Shifting the gun to his right arm, he took the extra cartridges which the Judge offered him. With the great extended palm of his left hand he grasped eight of them and

divided them between the left and right pockets of the old grey coat in which he was loosely wrapped.

Ignoring Macreath, but with a glance at the Judge who was now standing and watching his departure, the prisoner crashed off into the woods and into the totally absorbing night which closed stormily about the two men and the dogs left beside the fire.

It was but a few seconds more than twenty minutes since the prisoner had gone. Though half an hour had not yet passed, time seemed to Macreath infinitely extended. It also seemed long to the Judge, as waiting does to men in the presence of those with whom they are not in harmony.

The older man became preoccupied with his thoughts. In his experience as a judge, he believed that he had mastered self-doubt. Having made a decision, he had learnt to await the results with confidence. Something in the present circumstances caused him to lose that usual calm. Perhaps it was the physical fatigue he suffered, the lack of food, the discomfort of the cold. Perhaps it was this other man's uneasiness communicating itself, his barely concealed contempt for a world in which the Judge had always had his moral being. Whether from these causes or from subtler inner doubts, he had begun to examine again his decision to let the prisoner go into the forest, taking with him a loaded gun.

Macreath ended the silence. He looked towards the Judge, and he could not dissimulate the angry alteration in the taut thinness of his face.

"He's gone!" Macreath said.

"Yes," the older man replied. "To get someone to lead us out of these woods."

"No," Macreath answered offensively. "No. I mean gone —escaped!" There was emphasis on the final word. It would be a serious matter for the Judge if a paroled prisoner in his charge should escape.

"Escaped!" Macreath said again. But the remote snap, as of a branch broken as it is trod upon, sounded behind him in the darkness of the woods. At once he became silent, sitting in a tense position, listening.

The Judge followed his glance, looking briefly out into the blackness, a shadow of weariness upon his face. Then he turned, the firelight disclosing the healthy colour of his skin and the whiteness of his brows, and stared in time-effacing thoughtfulness into the heart of the fire.

Macreath listened still, holding tightly to his gun. The lightly-spotted setter and the pointer, about whose right ear there was a

broad liver-coloured marking, stirred, sometimes moving their forepaws in dreams, as dogs weary from hunting but unsated with it will do. The wind yawed among the trees, blowing in more siftings of snow. Thus passed, neither of them marking how much, some of the time of waiting for the two men.

The prisoner, leaving the men at the fire, moved into the woods with fixed resolution. He remembered having crossed earlier in the night the ruts of an old woods road. He walked sightlessly on and bore to his right, towards the point at which memory suggested that the road would lie. Observing any slight difference in feeling of the surface of the ground, he travelled quickly though without certainty. He still pressed under his feet the crinkling dryness of fallen leaves and the thin sponginess of the mould within a forest.

Still moving away from the hollow, he was well west of the point from which he had started. Thorns and tangled vines barred his way, but he lunged against them and strode through the detaining tendrils. The gun was cradled across his left arm; and he held his right forearm before his face as a protection against unseen twigs which might lash across his eyes. He had walked now for a long while.

He stopped. He remained unmoving for a moment; then he advanced, sliding his feet before him as though testing the solidity of the ground as he ventured upon it. He stood upon the hardness of raw clay. His feet discovered again the rigid unevenness of ruts beneath tufts of straw and weeds. In the blankness of night his body straightened in a slight gesture of exultation; he had found the abandoned road.

The only delaying elements were the sightlessness of the stormy night and the forest hissing and stirring gustily in the harassing wind. In both hands now he held the loaded gun. Knowing its potential deadliness, he felt a personal power in possessing it. He was again a man, free to decide, free to act. But there remained an uncertainty: a road leads in two directions.

In which direction was the edge of the woods, where a man might move swiftly? And which way led more deeply into the forest, into the closer marshalled trees and entangling brush, over the sponginess of swamps, beneath the hanging tatters of parasitic grey moss, among the snickering sounds of creatures in a mocking forest?

Snow flurried and beat against his face in a shift of wind. He decided the way out was in this direction, north. His decision had been made from suggestions so subtle that he would not have been capable of explaining them: some surviving directional

memory retained from daytime observations, some quality of contour in the land, some imperceptible but present alteration in the density of the trees—all of these reasons, which in their effect men would have characterised as instinct, impelled him to choose the direction as if in defiance of the darkness.

After a time of straining sightlessness had passed, during which he had been stumbling in unpausing haste along the abandoned road, he halted and listened. He had heard some sound. He waited, motionless, the gun gripped close before him. There seemed to be nothing out there now; but he was certain that he had heard some distant small sound such as is associated with habitation and with men. He began to walk again, rapidly and with sustained alertness, the gun ready for immediate use.

He had hurried on for perhaps another mile. Then abruptly the road ended. He emerged from the darkness of woods into the lesser obscurity of an opening where, even in the insufficient visibility, he was aware of the poverty of a clearing. He could discern, disclosed in the blackness, the gaunt destitution of a weathered cabin. It stood nakedly, the six uneven stumps of worm-eaten cedar which were its foundations exposed beneath it. Here gaped a vacancy through which wind and dust penetrated upwards between the cracks of the ill-joined rough boards which were the flooring of the two mean rooms above.

Out of this space, from beneath the ladderlike plank steps under which it had been lying, charged an unkempt dog with cupped tail. Circling, making snarling, evasive rushes at the heels of the intruder, the aroused animal by the fury of its barking awakened the occupants of the shack.

A man's voice, loud with alarm and challenge, shouted into the night from behind the partition of boards which served as a door. The prisoner heard the shout; he paused a moment, turning always to confront the attacking dog. Warily, slowly, still ready if he must do so to blast all life from the thin body of the snarling and skulking animal, he crept through the darkness and reached the splintery porch.

Again the voice shouted out.

"Who's that? What do you want?"

The prisoner, disconcerted by the attacks of the dog, hesitated. At last he found words with which to answer as he stood, an intruder come from the woods and waiting in the blackness with a loaded weapon.

"I want to talk to you," he called out in sudden resolution above the tumult of the barking.

"Come up by the door," the voice shouted. The suspicion in it gave way to challenge, and that was subtly altering to command.

"Call your dog," the prisoner answered. "It's not safe for me to move with this dog snapping at me."

There was an explosive shout from behind the door.

"Shut up, Patch!" the angry voice commanded.

In response to the angry shout, which he recognised, the dog obeyed. He skulked with cupped tail up the wooden steps and across the poor porch to cower by the wall of the shack. Half cringing, still growling in frustrated viciousness, he settled with a bony thump to sprawl on the splintery boards.

"Now who's out there?" the voice demanded again.

"I'm lost. I want to talk to you."

Question and answer were repeated in a ritual of suspicion.

"Wait! Stay where you are. I'll come out."

There was a silence within the shack.

The prisoner, waiting in the darkness, heard the wind once more and was conscious of the great forest from which he had come and which encircled this small space where he stood holding a gun, alert for whatever must now happen in this isolated clearing in the woods.

Someone was moving inside the cabin.

The prisoner heard a wooden bar being lifted from across the door. As he heard this sound and watched the cautious inward swinging of the door, the black crack widening slowly into the obscurity, he felt an emotion which surcharged and affected his whole body. He gripped the weapon, his long brown left hand under the base of the barrels, his right hand taut near the metal oval beneath the triggers. His voice issued once, huskily, from his constricted throat.

Then he cried out to the unseen figure which must be peering at him from the room through the slowly expanding width of blackness. "I've got a gun!"

In the forest the Judge had remained silent under the increasingly revealed scorn and animosity of Macreath. He felt that he must at least reply if the abuse continued. He had examined, he did not now know for how many times, the decisions and doubts of his own mind.

Again he reviewed them. Had his compassion for the humanity of a man, which he had seen in the suffering face of the prisoner, betrayed him into a critical error of judgment? Would the man, as Macreath suggested, try to escape? Would he attempt the more terrible folly of seeking to destroy, from the obscurity of the surrounding forest, Macreath and himself who waited, visible, by this diminishing but still light-giving fire? Or would his own belief in the man be sustained?

" Beyond jurisprudence," he murmured to himself. And as he stared across his slender updrawn knees into the centre of the flame, with a great physical weariness in which there was also hope, he concluded, " A matter of faith—faith in the qualities of a man."

Macreath saw the doubt on the Judge's face, which was lighted by the flagging of the dying fire. His own small black eyes were fixed with animosity on the older man. Macreath was again like a scolding squirrel.

" A strange system! " he complained, scorn in his complaint.

The Judge turned his head and asked mildly, " What? Having trusties? "

" Letting them out to act as porters at the Capitol. Letting them sleep in barracks in the city—criminals who might break loose some night." Bitterness and contempt, unhidden, now possessed Macreath.

" It wouldn't be that easy," the Judge answered, his patience becoming overwearied with the distortions by which the small man expressed his disapproval and his fear.

" But you knew that he was a murderer? " Macreath almost shouted.

The Judge's face flushed. He controlled the antagonism which might sound in his voice. " Of course! " he answered shortly.

" We started out this morning with your knowing . . ."

" He's gone with me for more than a year now! " There was an anger in the Judge's statement which should have altered by its warning the continuing offensiveness of Macreath's irritation; but the younger man renewed the attack.

" Knowing the whole time! " he said, his voice bitter and sarcastic.

" You see, Mr. Macreath," the Judge explained, determined to reason away this anger rising between them, and his own recurring doubts, " we who have always lived here know that there is a need to supplement the strict code of the law with equity—a social equity."

" For men like this? " Macreath was sneering.

The Judge could no longer entirely restrain his anger.

" Especially for men like this! " he shouted.

The smaller man, startled, huddled against the tree, but continued to look offended and angry.

Showing less irritation, the Judge continued. " There were mitigating circumstances," he said. " Otherwise, you can be sure that he would never have missed the final penalty. Men like Tom are given only what cannot be denied them."

"Huh!" The monosyllable was a cautious exclamation of reviving contempt. Macreath did not understand the Judge's explanation and he was irritated by it. He heard the wind and felt again the patter of snow into the hollow. Flakes blew into his collar and melted uncomfortably against his neck. His irritation increased and with it his uneasiness. He considered again his position—lost, sitting visibly in the firelight, surrounded by a vast muffling forest. And a murderer with a gun out there stalking about the blackness.

"His wife," the Judge continued, ignoring the exclamation, "was the most cherished thing in his rather mean existence . . . In the circumstances, Mr. Macreath, even you might have shot another man!"

The Judge permitted Macreath to measure the contempt which had been returned for his own. He then spoke again, in a more restrained and sober spirit.

"Such considerations, together with ten years of good behaviour, weigh with men in this area. That is why he was made a trusty."

"Trusty!" Macreath's sneer was open. It was given with intent to offend. "You'll never see him again. He's escaped, I tell you!"

"I don't believe he has."

The Judge said no more than this, but Macreath's words had affected him. He kept an intent silence, so that he would not betray by speech how full was the dislike which he felt for this man who had questioned his belief in his own judgment of himself and of other men.

He and Macreath both remained silent. The wind had become less stormy; there was no more snow. The stillness was more oppressive than the squalls had been. Time seemed to move on for ever and yet the night still hung there; and the shadows of the forest were unaltered, flickering and filled with small indistinguishable sounds near by, dense with unknowable blackness and silence in the distance.

The Judge, shutting out as best he could the presence of Macreath, had almost drowsed, his elbows laid loosely across his upraised spread knees, his head nodding above them. He would perhaps have slept, but the shots awakened him.

Bl-u-u-n-n-g! Bl-u-u-n-n-g!

There were two detonations, echoing off in the forest behind the hollow, the spent pellets of leaden shot spattering somewhere among the foliage. Then there was a long cry.

"Hoo-o-o-o-o-o-o! Hul-lo!"

"Hand me your gun!" the Judge commanded. He reached

out swiftly and pulled Macreath's weapon from the small man's almost paralysed grip. He fired two answering shots into the tree overhead.

"Hul-lo! Hul-lo!" he shouted, and then waited.

In the succeeding silence he heard many steps thrashing through the brush. He saw lights among the trees. Flickering here and there, but keeping a course towards the hollow, they made it seem as though there had arisen from the spongy dank earth of the forest a flight of fireflies.

The Judge watched, alert with expectation. Macreath was propped by one fully extended arm. In his face was visible the struggle to express the conflict of personal relief and of moral disappointment.

The lights came nearer, and the voices of countrymen and boys could be heard. At last, their red, weathered faces filled with grins, they stood in a triumphant but embarrassed circle by the fire and looked in friendly mockery at the two city men and their dogs. "You couldn't 'a' picked a worse thicket anywhere around here," one of them said.

Then the Judge saw the prisoner.

Lean, gaunt, dark, he stood conspicuous among the rescuers. He no longer had the bearing of an outcast. Even the look in his eyes seemed less melancholy, and he was smiling when the Judge came over to him.

"I told you, Judge, I'd get us out of these woods," he said.

The Judge let his hand touch lightly and for the briefest time upon the arm of the prisoner.

"That's right, Tom," he said. "On a night like this it takes a good man to find his way through a strange forest."

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SOLUTIONS to W FOR A BOB on page 57

1. *It would cost* £4,473,924 5s. 3¾*d.*
2. *Sir Gordon Richards.*
3. *a. H.M. the Queen; b. Lord Derby; c. Sir Winston Churchill.*
4. *The Colonel's son in Kipling's Ballad of East and West.*
5. *Wolfgangsee, in Austria.*
6. 62 *or* 63 *years.*
7. *i. a high, thorny brush fence; ii. two sets of parallel bars; iii. bars placed over a pit or ditch; iv. bars set in "steps" on a sloping hillside.*
8. *Nizefella and Wilf White; Prince Hal and Pat Smythe; Copenhagen and the Duke of Wellington; Foxhunter and Colonel Harry Llewellyn.*

HIPPOCRITICISM

The animals went in four by four,
The big hippopotamus stuck in the door.

ANON

We went padding through the streets, leaving huge deep footprints in the snow, on the hidden pavements.

"I bet people'll think there's been hippoes."

"What would you do if you saw a hippo coming down Terrace Road?"

"I'd go like this, bang! I'd throw him over the railings and roll him down the hill and then I'd tickle him under the ear and he'd wag his tail . . ."

"What would you do if you saw *two* hippoes . . .?"

Iron-flanked and bellowing he-hippoes clanked and blundered and battered through the scudding snow towards us as we passed by Mr. Daniel's house.

DYLAN THOMAS, *Memories of Christmas*

Hippopo-TT-amus

The genial hippopotamus
Is not exactly one of us,
He does not smoke, or drink or cuss,
And is, I've heard, monogamous.

A. G. PRYS-JONES, *Hippopotamus*

River Horseplay

The Hippopotamus is fat and good natured. He has seven wives or a total of twenty-one tons. His femur is flat. The Hippopotamus looks monogamous. He looks as if he would have to be. How he can appeal to seven other Hippopotamuses is his own secret. He keeps most of his face under water.

Hippopotamuses cannot bear to be alone, for obvious reasons. They have no clavicles and they care less. Hippos like fun. They love to submerge and reappear in unexpected spots. On the way up they will bite a chunk out of your catamaran or canoe. The Pigmy Hippopotamus inhabits Liberia and the Zoo. The Hippopotamus is the largest living non-ruminating, even-toed, ungulate mammal, and what does it get him? His hide is made into *jamboks* or *sjamboks* by the Ajumba. This animal reminded the Ancient Greeks of a horse, so they called him the River Horse. What a horse reminded them of is unknown.

WILL CUPPY, *How to Tell Your Friends from the Apes*

To the Hippopotamuse

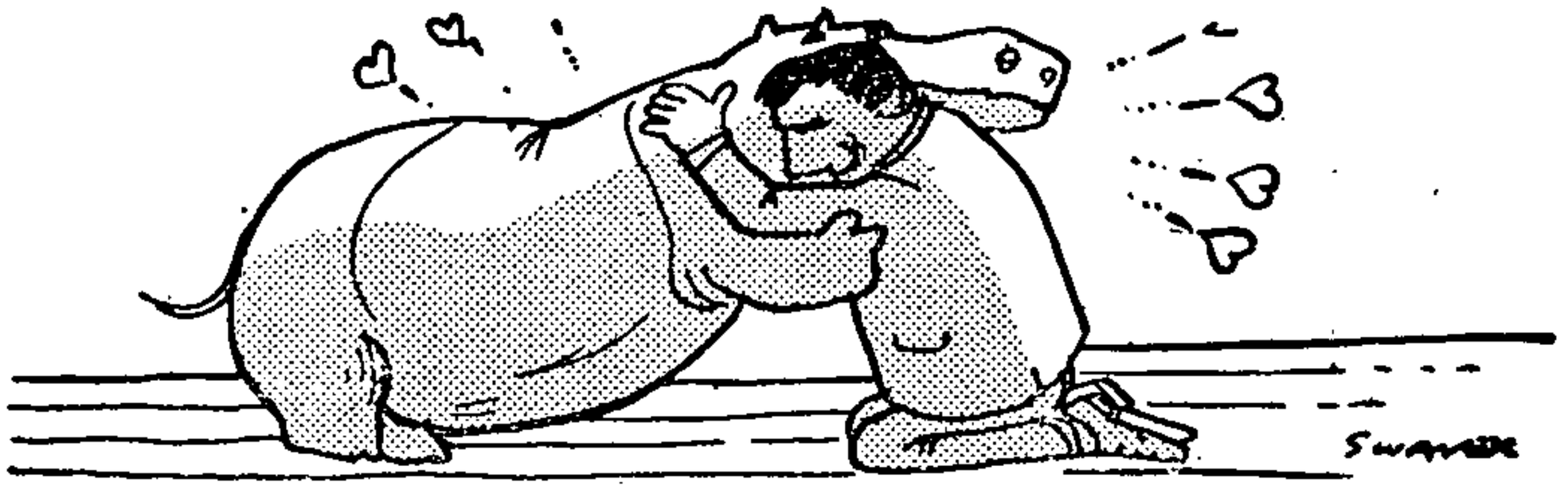
I had a hippopotamus; I loved him as a friend;
But beautiful relationships are bound to have an end.
Time takes, alas! our joys from us and robs us of our blisses;
My hippopotamus turned out a hippopotamissis . . .

My house now lacks the glamour that the charming creature gave,
The garage where I kept him is as silent as the grave;
No longer he displays among the motor-tyres and spanners
His hippopotamastery of hippopotamanners.

No longer now he gambols in the orchard in the spring;
No longer do I lead him through the village on a string;
No longer in the mornings does the neighbourhood rejoice
To his hippopotamusically-modulated voice.

I had a hippopotamus; but nothing upon earth
Is constant in its happiness or lasting in its mirth.
No joy that life can give me can be strong enough to smother
My sorrow for that might-have-been-a-hippopotamother.

PATRIC BARRINGTON, *I had a Hippopotamus*



Hippopotty

Three withered female figures are rocking in rocking chairs and knitting

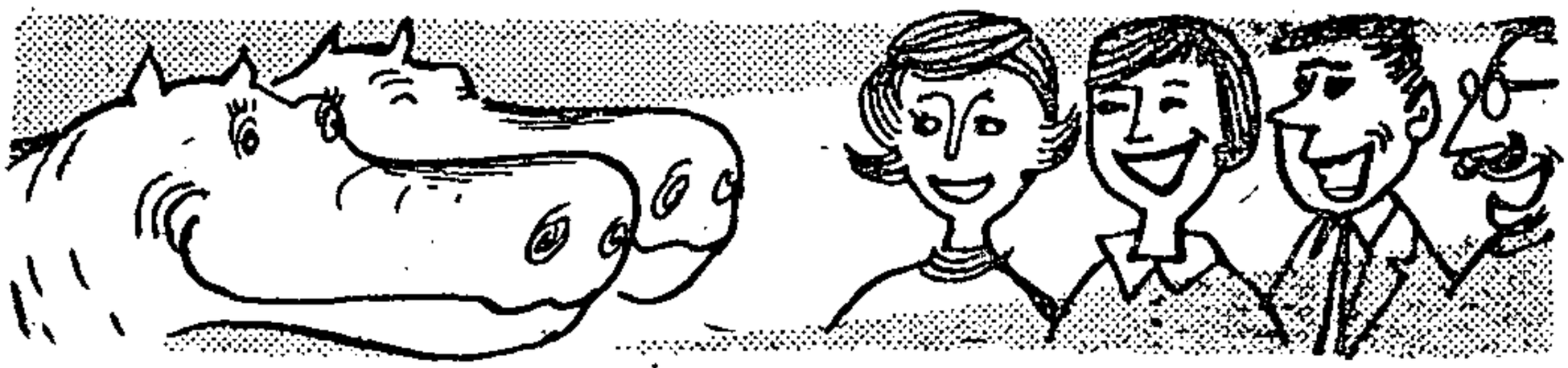
FIRST FIGURE: We called our hippopotamus It's Toasted.
SECOND: I wish my husband didn't object to them.
THIRD: Of course it's a bother to clean the cage every day.
SECOND: O I wouldn't mind doing that.
FIRST: Be sure to get one that can sing.
THIRD: Don't they all sing?
FIRST: O dear no. Some of them just whistle.
SECOND: I've heard they're very affectionate.
FIRST: I find them so.
THIRD: Did it take long to tame yours?
FIRST: Only a few days. Now he sits on my hand and doesn't bite me.
SECOND: How charming.
THIRD: Is it true they imitate policemen?
FIRST: My dear they imitate everybody.
SECOND: I'm afraid my husband wouldn't like that.
FIRST: What do you mean my dear?
SECOND: If ours imitated a policeman.
THIRD: Really? Why should he object?
SECOND: It would make him nervous I'm afraid—the idea of the thing.
FIRST: Your husband is a vegetarian?
SECOND: On the contrary my husband is a burglar.
FIRST: Oh, I see.

e.e. cummings, *him*

Hippopotomyopia?

Behold the hippopotamus!
We laugh at how he looks to us,
And yet in moments dank and grim,
I wonder how we look to him.

OGDEN NASH, *The Hippopotamus*



SPELLBINDER

I glanced through the instructions
and then I laughed

BY NORAH LOFTS

I HAD known Walter Barnwell for seven or eight years and we were, in a curious, negative kind of way, friends, though neither of us could have said why. I thought he was dull and pompous, spoilt by always having had things too easy; and he thought I was flippant and cynical and deserved to end where I had—teaching classics at an undistinguished prep school.

It seemed strange that any kind of friendship should have developed and been maintained between us, but propinquity, as has been observed before, is a powerful thing. Walter came into my orbit when one of his aunts—a sour old besom who lived in a house on the edge of the school grounds, and who wrote regular letters complaining of the noise the boys made—died and left him her house. He came down to dispose of her effects, fell in love with the house, which was a gem of the Queen Anne period, and decided to live in it, with his collections of china and glass.

Once installed, he found himself stranded. He hadn't been there long before he bought, in a London sale which was reported in the papers, a Bow clock, quite indescribably beautiful.

He showed it to Mrs. Hannet-Stokes—the social leader of the neighbourhood—and she spoke for all her set when she said, "But, Mr. Barnwell, for that money you could have bought a really good hunter!"

I chanced to meet the poor little man when he was feeling lonely and discouraged. I displayed—and it was unfeigned—an interest in, an admiration for all the beautiful things he had gathered together. So, though disapproving, he clung to me as to a rock in a weary land. I, for my part, was damned glad to go, two or three times a month, and eat one of his superb dinners, drink his good wines and his brandy, bask in the warmth of his heaped log fires, and look at all his treasures.

My inevitable envy was pleasantly mitigated by a kind of contempt. He was so dull; nothing amused him. My life was hard, disgusting, frustrating, sometimes intolerable, but I could almost always amuse myself.

Walter's house, though it gave an illusion of spaciousness, was not in fact over-large, and he had wisely, before moving in, spent a great deal of money on central heating and having it well modernised, so it was easy to run. He had an outside man who did the garden, cleaned the car, and carried in fuel; he had a housekeeper named Mrs. Missell—a grim-faced old tartar, but a wonderful cook; and he had also, for a number of years, a house-parlourmaid named Annie.

Quite a bit of the mild prejudice which built up against him was due, to tell the truth, to his managing to *keep* an indoor staff of two. Nobody else, for miles around, could do that. He didn't hunt, he wasn't married, he collected china, ivory, jade; he had two women servants. There must be something wrong somewhere.

Nothing was wrong with Walter; in fact, things were too good with him until Easter of the year 1955 when Annie received a most unexpected proposal from the milkman. They were married three weeks later, and public opinion was outraged by the ease with which Annie was replaced by another girl named Florence.

What was even more shocking was that in July, Walter actually sacked Florence; she had been insolent to Mrs. Missell—she should have had a George Medal at least—and she had broken, by careless dusting, the delicate fingers of a Dresden figure.

Florence was followed by Ada, Rosa, a German named Erma, an Italian named Maria, a Swede named Margarita, and two more English girls. They in turn qualified for George Medals, and worked havoc with the Dresden, the Chelsea, the Lowestoft, not to mention the Bristol glass.

"But what is really serious," Walter said to me when I dined with him one evening late in the November of 1955, on the eve of yet another departure, "is that Mrs. Missell is becoming unsettled by all these comings and goings. She actually said to me this morning—and I have never been so taken aback in all my life—she said that unless we soon found some steady and reliable girl, she would find this all too much for her. Fred, I am becoming desperate."

"There just aren't girls to be found," I said. I brought him up to date with the labour situation. I described the shifts and straits to which we at the school had been reduced, the Head's wife's evening efforts with what should have been, what might so easily have been, their last supper; the boys' bed-making and washing up.

"But that," said Walter, "is where you are wrong. There are plenty of girls about. I have had eight since April. No, Fred, the fault lies in the girls; in their *attitude*."

He had a genius for stating the obvious.

"All right, then," I agreed, "it's their attitude. It comes to the same thing in the end."

He brooded for a moment and then gave me the first surprise our long acquaintanceship had ever afforded.

"What is Pedlar's Plaster?"

"It might mean anything," I said. "I've only read about it in one sense—the common dock leaf. Pedlars, you see, suffered from an occupational disease, sore feet, and a nice cool dock leaf put over a blister or a raw spot would afford some relief."

"You are sure about that?"

"About the relief? No, I never had occasion to try it."

"About the name?"

"Oh yes," I said. "I can remember two references offhand. In Balmain's Herbal and a book called *Pedlars and Packmen*. The dock leaf was known by, and for all I know, still may be called by that name."

"Then I'll show you something." He got up and went to his bookshelves. "I was, on one occasion, driving through Halesworth in Suffolk," he said. "And there was a sale, so I looked in; and there, shoved aside with the rubbish, was a Bible box—you've seen my Bible box? I got it for five shillings. The auctioneer didn't know his job at all. He hadn't even looked inside. There were several little things, none of them valuable, but curious and interesting. And there was this."

He held out to me a very small book, bound in leather which had cracked and peeled. A shabby thing, quite unlike the rest of his treasures. I would have taken it, but he drew it back, sat down in his chair and turned the pages.

"Look at that," he said.

It had a musty reek. The pages were yellowed, spotted with brown. The print was thick, uneven, and badly aligned. A very old book indeed. Instinctively I looked at the front pages. It was undated.

I turned back to the page which Walter had indicated and read: *How to Catch a Virgin and Bend Her to Your Service.*

I glanced through the instructions and then I laughed.

"What fun this sounds! So simple, too. Do try it, Walter, one day when I have some time off. I would love to see you come home followed by a virgin 'amenable and meek.' Like Mary's little lamb."

"I intend to," he said solemnly. "I was merely waiting to identify Pedlar's Plaster."

I flicked over a page.

"And when you've brought this one off, here's another.

A beauty. *How to Raise a Crop of Warts upon the Countenance of an Enemy.* I'm tempted to try that on the Head."

"You are, as usual, flippant."

"Nonsense amuses me."

"How do you know it is nonsense?"

I had the perfect answer to that. "If there were anything in it," I said, "the institution of Holy Matrimony would have died out within a fortnight of this book's publication."

He was not amused; he took the book from me, rather crossly, I thought.

"Mind you," I said teasingly, "you'll have to go carefully about this dabbing ointment on girls. You might find yourself up for assault!"

"But you'll be with me. You just said so."

"You regard my company as a guarantee of respectability? Thank you, Walter. Just let me know when you finish your brew."

I went back to school and gave the joke no more thought until, about ten days later, the Head played his recurrent trick of shoving an extra evening's duty on me.

How nice it would be, I reflected, to raise a crop of warts on that smug countenance. I'm afraid that the thought made me accept the imposition with something less than my usual rancour. He looked quite surprised.

A day or two after that Walter telephoned me. He suggested picking me up at half past six and taking me to dine at a club to which he belonged in Talbridgeworth. He'd made his magic ointment—he showed it to me, a greenish paste; he carried it in one of those delightful little silver and enamel snuffboxes. He'd picked the girl, too; she was a waitress at the club. As we entered I said, rather aptly, I thought, "Lay on, Macduff!"

We went into the bar, and Walter, who ordinarily drank sherry before dinner and was fussy about it, chose whisky, to my delight; and he drank three, so I guessed he was bracing himself.

In the dining-room he refused a table near the fire, and chose another in a less favoured place. I soon saw the point of that. We had no sooner seated ourselves than up came the waitress, and my respect for Walter's acumen rose. It wasn't only about china that he was knowledgeable.

This girl, whose name was Muriel, could, I thought, only have been a success in Wells' Country of the Blind, or in the Polar winter when it is dark for twenty-four hours a day. She was fat and shapeless, she had a squint and no forehead, a receding chin and prominent teeth.

She said amiably, " Good evening, Mr. Barnwell," and proffered the menu.

Walter said, " Good evening, Muriel," and, drawing his hand from his pocket, took the menu. I watched carefully and saw that the " touch " had been successful. While we decided what to eat, Muriel studied the base of her thumb, thoughtfully licked it, and rubbed it on her apron.

When she went towards the service door I said, " Well done, Walter! "

Nothing happened, however. All through the meal I amused myself by imagining improbable situations, always assuming that the spell had worked. How embarrassed Walter would be! We lingered over the meal, and then over coffee and brandy, allowing time for the magic to take. But there was no reaction at all.

" I would hardly have believed it, would you? " Walter said solemnly, as we walked, unaccompanied, unfollowed, to the car.

" I still don't," I said. " Either you didn't make it right, or it's a phoney recipe."

" No. I have noticed that almost every girl in her middle teens has some attractiveness, however plain she is going to be later. Just a blush of youth as it were."

" Then you must try a younger subject."

" I intend to," he said. " Incidentally, Mrs. Missell mentioned leaving again today. I have no time to waste." He looked at his watch. " It's too late to see a film, but I have an excuse . . . " He started his car and steered for the cinema.

The main film was well under way, and the usherettes were standing gossiping softly at the back of the foyer. Recently an attempt to brighten up the place had been made and included dressing the girls in page-boy uniforms, very natty: tight, straight trousers; tight, braided jackets, and little pill-box hats. It is a juvenile style; all the same, the girl for whom Walter made a beeline couldn't have been more than sixteen.

An older girl, who was on the outside of the group, turned to look at us inquiringly, but Walter showed his mettle.

" It's this young lady I want to have a word with," he said, indicating the girl of his choice. To her he said, " I think you showed me into my seat last Thursday evening. I wonder if you noticed that I dropped a glove? "

She said in a prim, automatic way, " All lost property is collected by the cleaners and taken to the manager's office where it can be reclaimed."

All the other girls nodded a confirmation of that.

" Thank you so much," Walter said heartily. " And where is the office? "

"Up the stairs, first landing, second floor."

"Thank you," he said again; and taking his hand from his pocket he pressed half a crown into hers.

"You're welcome," she said, and turned back to her friends.

We mounted the stairs and Walter looked slowly, seriously, through a box of curious objects which the manager obligingly produced. There were at least two dozen gloves, paired or single, there was a mass of worthless trinkets, strings of beads, rings, bracelets, and three cigarette lighters, one of them a good one.

"People are very careless," said the manager.

"Gosh," I said, "there's my lighter! I've hunted everywhere. I never thought of asking here."

"Which one?" he asked, without interest.

"That," I said, indicating the good one. He gave it to me, and I cuddled it in my hand.

"Dear old friend," I said, "how I have missed you!"

"No," said Walter regretfully, "I don't see my glove here."

We slowly descended the stairs. Within the cinema the story, judging by the noise, was reaching its climax. The usherettes, though still gossiping, were alerted. Walter gave his intended prey a wistful look, and received a stony stare.

Outside he said, "Perfectly scandalous! A girl of that age!"

"Anyway," I said, "I've got a . . . my lighter back."

It would be tedious to tell in detail every move in this campaign which, even to me, soon ceased to be even mildly amusing and became a bore. There was one bright spot. Walter, under pressure from Mrs. Missell, became desperate and bold enough to venture forth alone in his search. He boarded a bus one day, and touched a likely-looking subject who dealt him a backhander that broke his upper denture. None of his other attempts met with any response at all. The autumn term ended, Christmas came and went.

It was January, and school had started again when Walter invited me to dinner.

"It'll be the last time that I can offer you any entertainment, I'm afraid. Mrs. Missell has given notice."

"I am sorry to hear that," I said, and there was genuine regret in my voice. Good-bye to those snug little dinners.

Walter's failure had depressed him so much that I hadn't the heart to say, "I told you so," when he said dolefully, "Well, so much for magic. And so much for the womanhood of England. Would you believe that my own niece, my sister Hilda's child . . . still at school . . . I tried her in the holidays. It really is disgraceful."

I said, in an attempt to be just, " You can't blame both, Walter. It seems to me just another proof that magic and spellbinding are all nonsense."

" I've tried, in all, thirty-two." He took the little snuffbox and dropped it into the waste-paper basket.

" Hi," I said, " don't throw out the baby with the bath water. It's a pleasant little box; valuable, too."

" I never want to see it again."

" Then if I may," I said, retrieving it. " It will make an elegant container for my Aspirin." In my job the Aspirin consumption is above average. I put the box in my pocket . . .

At school all doors were locked promptly at ten o'clock; the Head or the master on duty saw to that. Behind the side door was a board with several hooks, and on those hooks were three spare keys to the Yale lock of that door. If a master, or the matron, was off duty and expected to be back later than ten, he or she took a key and stuck on its hook a piece of card bearing his or her name. When the key was replaced the piece of card was put in an old nib box on the windowsill.

On the evening of this dismal dinner with Walter, I walked back to school, arriving just as the clock struck eleven. Matron had been out and had returned just before me and was standing by the door, wrestling with her key.

As soon as she saw me she voiced a complaint which I had heard before. " This key is faulty. Nine times out of ten it gives me trouble."

" It's Freudian," I explained. " Your subconscious shirks the idea of returning to this place of wrath and tears."

She gave me the sniff and the look, so eloquent of disapproval. " You try it, then," she said, and stood back.

I gave the key the little extra push it needed, and turned it. The door opened, and she walked in ahead of me. I gave her her key, by which she could reclaim her piece of cardboard, and then hung up my own.

" Good night, Matron," I said civilly.

I was almost at the foot of the stairs when she called me, keeping her voice low. " Mr. Summers, it's such a cold night. I'm going to make myself a cup of cocoa. Would you like some? "

I was, actually, in no need of cocoa, but I make it a practice never to refuse anything. So I turned and followed her into the kitchen, and smoked a cigarette while she made the cocoa, using, I noticed with approval, all milk and no water. We sat down on opposite sides of the big scrubbed table, and I looked at her, consciously, for the first time.

In her uniform she was simply Matron, solid, well starched

and corseted, level-headed, hygienic; slightly awe-inspiring. Out of uniform she much resembled a policewoman in plain clothes. She had reddish hair and the raw-looking complexion which so often accompanies it, her eyes were a hard, pale blue, and her eyelashes almost white.

As we drank our innocuous but illicit nightcap, she leaned forward so that her solid bosom touched the table. "You've got a button loose on that coat," she said. "If you give it to me in the morning I'll sew it on for you."

"That's very kind," I said. It was also surprising. She was prone to pointing out that she had only one pair of hands, that little boys couldn't be expected to do things for themselves, but that adult males must expect no coddling.

"I've often wondered about you, you know, Mr. Summers," she went on. "You seem to me far too good and clever to be stuck in a place like this. You should have a school of your own."

"Then for once we are of the same opinion."

"Why don't you start one, or buy one?"

"For the same reason that you don't buy a mink coat."

I expected anger; but she laughed, looking down at the rubbed, lustreless fur of her beaver lamb.

"I could have a mink coat if I wanted one," she said. "But mink would be wasted on me. I intend to do something sensible and constructive with my money."

"You have money?"

"A nest egg," she said modestly.

"Nice for you. Well, thanks for the cocoa."

"And don't forget that button," she said.

I swear that I had no suspicion as to what had happened.

I even forgot to take advantage of the offer to fix my button, but next day when I went to my room I found it sewn on, and what is more, my suit had been sponged and pressed.

At bedtime I threw myself into bed as usual, and practically bounced out again; my sagging, springless mattress, worn hollow by the pressure of many weary bodies, had been replaced by a brand-new box-spring mattress, very buoyant. I might have been more startled by this replacement had it not been so long overdue, a quarter of a century to put it charitably. I hoped that some poor slob, master or boy, was feeling similarly pleased with my old one, for mine had been far from the worst in the establishment.

Two days later I had a mild sniffle. It was a bitterly cold day, and I was due for duty on the football field. I was viewing this prospect with distaste but with fortitude, when Matron announced, "Mr. Summers is incubating a really nasty cold. A couple of

days in bed for him *now* will save a heap of trouble later on."

I was again somewhat surprised, but the surprise was swallowed up in relief. I retired to my comfortable mattress and watched, with great pleasure, a few snowflakes drift idly down.

Truth, as they say, is great and cannot be hid. Truth began to dawn on me when, at the end of my second day in bed, Matron herself brought up my supper tray. In one corner of it was a tiny glass vase of sweet, dark violets. There was clear soup in a covered cup, and in one of those double plates, kept heated by hot water—where had she found that Victorian relic?—some breast of chicken in white sauce, new potatoes well-buttered, and tasty, defrosted peas.

She laid this oblation on my knees and said, "And you don't have the Head or his wife to thank for that! I went into town—this is my free day, you know—and did the shopping myself."

Then I knew. Nothing but magic could account for this. At some time during his thirty-two experiments, Walter had smeared some of the paste on the outside of the box. I had touched it, and in handing Matron her key I had, all unwittingly, worked the spell. Dreamily sipping the soup, I looked into a future not lacking in comfort; good matrons are as rare as good parlourmaids, and wield great power. Sheltered under Matron's banner who dared touch me, criticise, or impose upon me? No one can say that my expectations were anything but modest . . .

"I've been thinking," she said, "about our conversation the other evening. You remember? About your having a school of your own. I cut this out of the paper . . ."

I took the clipping. While I read it she watched me with the intent, pathetically earnest expression of a well-meaning dog which has done its best and hopes for a word of praise. The clipping concerned a prep school, for sale 'on account of ill-health,' as they invariably are, and no wonder. It sounded stylish and prosperous, and was expensive; but half the price could remain on mortgage.

"Would it do?" Matron asked.

"Do for what?"

"Us." She blushed furiously. "You see . . . I thought, you and I, between us . . . You're wasted here, really, and my money is just waiting. I mean, I'd like a place of my own, but I'm not clever enough alone. With you—"

"It needs careful thinking over," I said. "Tell me, why pick on me? Bates is younger and handles boys well, Thomas has a better degree. Why me?"

She looked confused. "Instinct, I suppose. At least partly. And then you're so clever. It came over me the other evening

when you mentioned Freud and my not wanting, in my subconscious, to come back here. You see it was so true; but I hadn't realised it. Then it struck me like lightning."

"Well," I said, "that seems a slender reason for taking such a risk. But I'll think it over, if that's what you really want."

"Oh, I do. That's all I want in the world, Mr. Summers—to do something for you."

"Now look," I said sternly, "let's start off on the right foot. You're doing nothing for me. Let that be understood. I'm taking on, to please you, a great deal more work and responsibility; I'm not taking on any obligation as well."

"Oh no, no. Of course not." She sounded horrified. "I didn't mean it that way at all. I only meant that if we went into partnership I should be able to look after you, see that you didn't work too hard, and had decent food, and so on. As for obligation, why, you know, Mr. Summers, it would be the other way round. I should be indebted to you all my life."

That sounded more like it. I glanced at the cutting again. "Broadstairs—very nice. You'd like me to investigate this?"

"If only you would."

I do not usually indulge in daydreams, but I did, for a second or two, visualise the scene in which I told the Head that I was going to have a school of my own. That would move him little, chaps like me are ten a penny. It would be when I said that Matron was coming with me . . . Much worse than a crop of warts! That brought my mind back to poor old Walter.

"I want to make a telephone call," I said.

"You can do that from my room."

She helped me into my dressing-gown, found my slippers, and then, supporting me tenderly but stoutly, led me to her room. I dismissed her and gave Walter's number. When he answered me in a very dispirited voice, I said, "Make a new batch, old man, and try again. They're hard to come by but, my word, when it works it's wonderful!"

"It's too late. You see, I remembered what you said about holy matrimony. I've just asked Mrs. Missell to marry me."

"Ah well," I said, "that's nearly as good. Best of luck, Walter."

Laughing heartily I went back to bed. © Norah Lofts 1959

★ ★ ★

COMEHITHER

The French Vocabulary office has suggested replacing "le sex appeal" by "le viens-par-ici." *The Observer*

★ *Malcolm Munthe—son of Axel Munthe, the famous author of The Story of San Michele—makes a first appearance in Argosy with this brief incident from his experience as a British Liaison Officer to the underground movement in Norway. Later, on special duties in Italy, he was awarded the M.C. His latest book, Hellens, came out in 1957.*

SKEAN-DHU'S DAY

BY MALCOLM MUNTHE

IN A DRAWER at home lies a small skean-dhu, used sometimes for cutting the pages of foreign books. But mostly the old knife just lies. The black heather-wood hilt grows drier, the black leather sheath more perished, the worn silver mountings more tarnished year by year.

Alone, unchanged, on the hilt sparkles a small pinkish stone of unusual brilliance. It was supposed to be a cairngorm stone from the rugged hills of Scotland, but jewellers shake their heads and say it is undoubtedly a spinel ruby. The glow of it is red like a drop of blood, but there is nothing sanguinary about it. The skean-dhu just lies and waits to cut the pages of books from abroad.

"Has it ever been used in earnest?" asked a friend who borrowed it recently–to sharpen his pencil. "Has it?" he persisted.

The answer is, "Once."

In the summer of 1940 I escaped from the Nazis in Norway and reached neutral Sweden. The British Military Attaché at our Legation there thought I might be useful in helping the Norwegian secret resistance, and arranged for me to be seconded from the Gordon Highlanders and posted as Assistant Military Attaché to Stockholm.

My mother sent me out from home my best uniform, complete with kilt, glengarry, silver bonnet-badge, and skean-dhu. On the rare occasions when I was ordered to accompany my chief to some official function, the uniform never failed to provide amusement for the Scandinavians: the horsehair on the sporran would be tweaked and the skean-dhu in my right stocking examined. Even our own people would remark the redness of the stone in its hilt.

My job was to sift the daily stream of Norwegian volunteers who escaped over the mountains to offer their services to Britain. We could use the best of them to help build up the resistance in Norway.

Among the volunteers who called at my office was a tall young Norwegian with thick, auburn, kinky hair. He had been sent over from Norway by the resistance organisation in the west near Bergen to tell me—he was particular that it should be to me personally—of the whereabouts of a secret arms dump near the Swedish border which they wanted my help in reclaiming and distributing.

When I tried to plan with him some method of having the arms collected, he insisted that the farmer who owned the barn under which they were hidden would only entrust the secret of their whereabouts to me in person when he saw me at his farm.

I sent Kinky away, and after several days of inquiry was able to find nothing against him. When he returned I decided that it was probably only the faintly beery look of his ruddy skin that made me like him less than some of my callers; that it was a purely personal reaction and based on no reasonable dislike. I agreed finally to a plan of his which was modified twice to suit better my ideas of security.

The day before I was to start off from Stockholm on my journey to the frontier, two Norwegians I did not know called to tell me they knew of Kinky's plan—he was in the pay of the enemy and intended to have me murdered. I cancelled the journey and gave Kinky a plausible excuse.

I did not, in fact, believe the two Norwegians who had warned me. Norway, by and large, is not a murderous country, and Kinky, whether or not I liked him, did not look like a murderer to me. Not, of course, that my experience was very wide.

Kinky never visited me again. But after some weeks, during which I had tried to obtain a load of secondhand submachine-guns from Finland for secret distribution in Norway, I found I had to make an expedition to the frontier of Norway at a point some miles south-west of Särna. This was near enough to the area of Kinky's operation to tempt me to try to find his arms dump on my own. I had the address of the "safehouse" where I was to have met Kinky in our original plan. A woman who claimed to have helped me with food and shelter during my escape—much farther south—was, according to him, now living there.

By good fortune I had a cast-iron excuse for visiting Leksand, quite openly. Leksand, in the centre of Sweden, is on a lake some thirty miles long, to the north-west of which a belt of forest

stretches almost uninterruptedly to the Norwegian frontier.

I could remain officially at Leksand during the three days of a long weekend, but no longer. During that time my trip to Norway and back must be accomplished. It was winter, or late autumn, for I remember dark, raw weather and snow on the hills.

In Stockholm, one of my most trusted collaborators at that time was Johnny Pevik, a straight, high-minded Norwegian with an unusual capacity for silence. He was small, wiry, with a Wellington nose, golden hair, and bright blue eyes. He was about twenty.

I had also a Swedish friend, older, a married man with children, who helped us for purely idealistic reasons of his own. I have promised not to divulge his name, so shall call him S. On this occasion it was S who organised transport for us in his antiquated, roomy Ford.

I took the train to Leksand on a Friday morning; saw a number of acquaintances there in the afternoon, and retired early to bed, having lit a fire in the tall china stove in the lodge where I was the sole occupant.

At about half past nine in the evening I got up. I put on my most Scandinavian-looking country clothes; a short mackintosh jacket acquired in Norway during my earlier sojourn and a pair of blue overall trousers. Underneath I wore two pairs of thick khaki knitted stockings which belonged to my uniform, and in the right garter I stuck my skean-dhu. I wore Swedish ski boots. I took no revolver.

In case anyone from another lodge should see or hear me using the front door, I let myself down from the window at the back of the cottage. I skirted the fringe of wood along the edge of the lake and reached the forest. It was very dark; I remember no snow on this part of the journey.

I walked for upwards of an hour to the village of Hjortnäs, following the high road but stepping into the shadow of the forest when the occasional bus or other vehicle passed by. Just beyond the village a crossroad runs down to the lake to the south. Beyond the crossroad is a patch of forest where I was to meet Johnny Pevik in S's car.

I waited nearly an hour; then a car drew up, made the agreed signal with its lights, and I scrambled in. Pevik had a friend, Ola Naess, who sat by the Swedish driver, while Johnny and I sat at the back. We drove on, talking only Norwegian in low voices—and very little at that—until we approached a place called, I believe, Fulunäs. I remember we used to call it "Ugly Nose." A few miles from this place was the Swedish farm where our load was to be hidden temporarily.

We stopped the car and Johnny and I drank cups of hot ersatz coffee from a flask and ate sandwiches in silence. There were patches of snow in places where the sun never reached, and on the hills the pines and firs showed up black against the white ground. With a minimum of equipment on his back, Johnny then said good-bye on behalf of both of us as we got out of the car. The driver, with Naess beside him, turned off on a small road to the left while we followed a forest track on our right.

The track led to a clearing—a stubbly field with a barn at one end of it. Here, under some hay and piles of old timber, skis belonging to Johnny and to Naess were hidden. I was to borrow skis from Naess. We trudged on towards Norway, seeing no one.

At the end of a climb lasting several hours we came upon a road which, clearly visible from where we stood, led up to a large farm. That was, according to Kinky's description, my "safe-house." The woman who had given me food many months ago was said to live here now. Pevik was to do the talking to begin with. We approached the porch and knocked on the door.

A querulous voice called to us from within. Pevik opened the door. In a large kitchen by the stove, a wood-burning range, sat a very old woman; I did not think I had ever seen her before. In conversation with her, Pevik used Kinky's password, which did not produce the counter-pass from the old woman.

A young man came in and the password was tried again, twice, with no effect at all. Later, a girl of about eighteen came in. I was sure I had not seen her before.

Pevik was making ready to beat a retreat when the girl, looking out of the window, said she saw her mother coming towards the house. I am pretty certain I had never seen the mother, but within a few seconds the password was tried out again and she gave the correct reply immediately. We were offered a meal.

The woman looked about thirty-five; tallish and, curiously enough, she had exactly the same auburn, curly hair as Kinky. She knew the farmer who had the arms dump and would put me in touch with him later. He was away from home but would be back in about an hour.

Pevik was getting worried in case the delay should prevent him getting to his immediate destination before nightfall. There was no object in his remaining longer with me, so as soon as the table was cleared he left to pursue his journey. The woman was not in the room, so she did not know of his departure till she came back—when I thought she seemed noticeably surprised. She was ready to show me the road to her farmer friend.

She led the way up to a rise and from there she pointed to a farther hill beyond which, in a valley, I would see the three black

roofs of the farm I wanted. She made much of the importance of my climbing up to the top of the hill, instead of winding round its base—either north or south—into the valley beyond; she said a Nazi watch-post was situated on the left-hand slope of the hill. I thanked her and we parted.

I am quite sure I did not misunderstand her instructions. She repeated several times that the enemy watch-post was on the left of the hill as we looked at it: that is, on the south slope. She directly informed me the safest way was over the top of this hill—the top, from which I would be able to see the Nazi sentries below me on my left. How far the next enemy post north would be, she could not say exactly—but I would be able to see it from the top, too. I am certain, to this day, I understood aright what she said.

The climb up the east face of this steep hill, through fairly thick forest, was slow going. I followed no visible track. There was a small sort of plateau about halfway up, where I noticed the trees had been cut down. There was no evidence that this had been done recently. Ahead lay the more sparsely-wooded top of the hill. I climbed on.

As far as I remember this was the lightest time of the day, but nevertheless visibility was poor and misty. I put my hand on the stripped trunk of a pine before I realised it was not a growing tree but part of an improvised observation tower at the top of the hill. A uniformed soldier in a greatcoat, muffled to the eyes and carrying a gun, stepped out from behind it.

Politely he asked to see my pass.

I had no papers of any kind on me. I fumbled in my pockets with a half-smiling, half-bored look on my face—slapped my thigh and said I had forgotten my wallet, it was at home. I explained this in an exasperated voice in fairly good Norwegian. Here, if I am right in thinking he had been warned of my arrival, he gave himself away; he beckoned to another man who had appeared from the other side of the tower and I was in manacles before I had been asked any further questions.

The second man then proceeded to search me for firearms: my armpits, hip pockets, trouser pockets. He patted the outside of my legs to feel for any protruding object—but stopped short of my skean-dhu.

I was by now heatedly arguing that I often passed over that hill—they knew me well—I was only going over to my neighbour to fetch some medicine for my father who was ill; it was urgent. The second man slung a rope between my manacles and in this way, at a distance of about a yard and a half, held me on a string.

They made no pretence of interrogating me. The first man gave some orders I could not understand, in German, and I was led down the hill by my armed and helmeted gaoler, a fat man who seemed encumbered by his thick clothes.

He kept prodding me on with the tip of his gun, but as the ground was uneven and I kept addressing him about the urgency of my errand, we were mostly walking abreast of one another. Also, it must soon have become evident to him that, as my hands were manacled in front of my body, his rope tended to get twisted and unduly short if I jolted down the slope ahead of him. He was not a smart-looking soldier.

We reached the plateau I had noticed on my way up the hill, and by then I judged the mist would make us invisible to the lookout tower. If I was to get away at all, now was the time.

I gabbled away volubly in Norwegian, and with rising assurance as I noticed he answered me in guttural German. To my surprise he led me to a thick clump of trees only a few yards from a place I must have passed on my way up, where a horse and sleigh were tethered.

Spitting and swearing, he turned his back on me to unfasten the horse, slackening momentarily as he did so the rope which bound me to him.

I started talking again and quickly drew up my right trouser-leg, grabbed the skean-dhu with both hands, and plunged it into the broad padded back of the man before me. It would stick in the quantity of coats—leather, cloth, wool, he had on. The blade would be too short to reach home and kill him; it would light on a rib or backbone and glance sideways . . . I remember all these fears as if the Nazi's back was before me now.

The little skean-dhu plunged as though into cake—right up to the hilt. To my terrified amazement, instead of turning on me, the man sank under my tied hands. He sank to the ground as I pulled out the knife. Still clutching it, I ran leaping over boulders down the hill. I don't think he shouted or groaned.

In what seemed like a second I saw on my right, in the distance, the house of the woman who had given us a meal. I galloped on through trees till I came to the road. The noise of my own running would have prevented me from hearing a herd of reindeer had they been after me, but I could not stop. Even at the road, my only instinct was to run for my life in the direction of Sweden.

I crossed the road and was in the forest again until about midnight, when I sighted the road to " Ugly Nose " a few hundred yards below me. I knelt down at the base of a Christmas tree and was sick.

After sitting there for some minutes I realised that the rope by which I had been tethered to my Nazi gaoler was still dangling from my manacles. With the help of my teeth I got it unknotted. The skean-dhu was still in my hands, so I dug it up and down into the soft peaty earth at the root of the tree. The blade became clean and shiny once more. I tucked it and my hands—Chinese mandarin fashion—up the sleeves of my mackintosh jacket and strolled negligently on to the road.

I was in Sweden. I walked in the direction of " Ugly Nose " and arrived, much too soon, at my rendezvous.

S's car appeared in due course and gave the agreed signal with its lights. Naess, already grinning in recognition, stuck his arm out and opened the door before I walked up, so I got in with my hands deep in my sleeves—to keep them warm.

At Hjortnäs I got out, still with my hands tucked up, elbowing the handle of the door down to open it from inside. I then shouldered the door shut again. Naess and the driver waved, and I wagged my chin at them. Their orders had been not to talk to me.

Through the silent forest I walked on to Leksand.

There is an iron gate with spikes on top in the wall at the back of the lodge where I was sleeping. It led, once upon a time, to the churchyard. It had been locked for many years. I placed the weakest-looking link in the chain which joined my manacles on one of the spikes and then swung on it with my whole weight. The chain burst, and I was in bed by seven in the morning.

In the train, later in the day, no one noticed the rather heavy bracelet I was wearing under my shirtsleeve—though it slipped down as I was tipping the waitress in the restaurant car.

At the Chancery of the British Legation in Stockholm the kindly porter asked if I had had a nice weekend. I told him it had been very jolly, as I slit open the letters he handed me with my little skean-dhu.

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SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 144

Across. 1, *Convalescents.* 7, *Nonsense.* 8, *Calves.* 10, *Coldly.* 13, *Drainage.* 18, *Unwarranted.* 19, *Son.* 20, *Imp.* 21, *Dreadnought.* 22, *Arrested.* 26, *Dry-rot.* 28, *Empire.* 29, *Narrated.* 30, *Shepherdesses.*

Down. 2, *Nosed.* 3, *Annoy.* 4, *Emend.* 5, *Cocoa.* 6, *Nylon.* 7, *Necessitate.* 9, *Steel-plated.* 11, *Launder.* 12, *Lawless.* 14, *Reason.* 15, *Integer.* 16, *Auditor.* 17, *Bridge.* 23, *Elite.* 24, *Teeth.* 25, *Diner.* 26, *Dirge.* 27, *Years.*

THE MIRROR ROOM

CHRISTOPHER LANDON

Paul and I were identical twins: so alike we could even take out each other's girls and get away with it. Our careers differed: Paul, a research scientist at a rocket station; I, in my last year at hospital—where Paul rang to ask me to stand in for him and meet his girlfriend, Lydia. Lydia thought I was Paul, and took me to their sinister contact, Bertil. I realised with horror that Paul had been passing top-secret data to Bertil and taking money in return. I realised too that I, Hugh, was falling in love with Lydia.

I went to a Colonel in M.I.5 who took over, and asked me to impersonate Paul who had vanished—perhaps to Berlin. The Colonel sent me to Paul's flat to wait until Bertil came to track me down . . .

The doorbell rang.

THE doorbell rang again. Another short jab.

I went out into the hall which was in darkness. There was a thin strip of light filtering round the jamb of the door. There was no safety-chain; once I let the catch go, Bertil or whoever was outside would be in.

I called once before I opened, just the futile, "Who's there?" then I slipped the catch and opened the door slowly . . .

It was Paul's girlfriend, Lydia.

She stood very straight, holding a big black handbag clasped in front of her. She was in a dark suit that showed off her slimness to the best advantage, and the white neck of the blouse seemed to accentuate the pale, creamy texture of her throat and face. There was no expression there . . . except in her eyes, and in them I could only read anguish. She made no move, and I said gently, "Lydia."

"I had to come, Paul; I had to talk. Are you alone?"

I nodded and waved her into the flat. She stood, hesitant, in the hall; and I could see that she did not know which way to go. She had not been here before. I took both her hands in mine and said, "Now, what's it all about? You shouldn't really have come here, you know."

"I know, Paul, I know. You told me never to come to your flat. But I had to talk to you. If I telephoned, I was frightened that you would ring off. And it is so desperately important to me." She freed her hands from mine, as if ashamed of the contact, and fell silent for a moment.

I opened the door of the sitting-room and stood aside until she had gone in. "Sit down, Lydia. Would you like a drink?"

She nodded absently, going over to the big armchair, sitting straight up in it, her legs crossed, her hands clasped over her bag.

As I mixed a whisky and soda, I watched for a moment the way the light from the standard lamp seemed to caress the waves of her dark hair. How beautiful she was, and how much worse that made the pull between what I wanted, and what I had to do. I loved her, but there was Paul, and the part in the stake for bigger things that I had promised to play. And I could not forget she was a link in the chain that had made him do what he had done.

Lydia put out her hand to take the glass, and then looked up at me sharply, her nose wrinkling. "Paul—whatever is the matter with you? You're dreaming. You know I hate that stuff."

"Sorry. I wasn't thinking." I put the glass down by the other chair, remembering that it was not a simple question of finding out what she wanted. There was the added danger of not giving myself away on things like this . . . things about her that I should know.

"What are you going to have with your gin, then?"

"Just water, please." There was still the trace of that foreign accent in her voice.

I took the drink over and sat down opposite, watching her. There was so much I wanted to know, and must find out without giving myself away.

How far was she involved with Paul in the twisted life I had taken over from him? How deep were their personal relations? What thoughts were racing through the brain behind that pale face and those haunted eyes? I had to find out. This was a time when attack was the best form of defence.

"Why did you come here, Lydia?" I could see the knuckles of her hands go white as she clenched them in her lap.

"You know why. You know enough to have a little understanding . . . if you cared."

"I know a little," I said. "But not enough to be compromised like this. There's probably somebody watching this flat all the time I am here. You risked that . . . Why was it so important to see me?"

She got up, drink in hand, walked over to the couch, and sat near me. Then with desperate urgency, her voice husky and almost a whisper, she spoke again as if starting to retell a familiar story.

"Paul, we came into this for different reasons. But however different those reasons were at the start, we are now both held in the same trap—blackmail. You for fear of being exposed. I for love."

"Of me?"

There were tears in her voice, but not in her eyes. "Love of you? Now? Oh, no! Once, yes, I thought I loved you, when I thought I meant something to you. But not now. Not after the way you have behaved. Love for my parents . . .

"I don't believe you are capable of love. But can't you understand how it is for me—when the only people in the world I love are cut off from me, marooned, in a place where their food might be stopped at a moment's notice, their heat, their light, even the roof taken from over their heads. And not because of anything they have done. Because of me! It could happen, Paul. Think of your own mother in that position. It could happen. And it *will* happen. Unless you help me . . ."

"How?"

"That rocket stuff—Hidyn. You've got to get everything you can on it. At once. Bertil summoned me today. There seemed a terrible urgency. He was horrible. He told me that he held me responsible for seeing that you produced the information. That means my parents . . ."

"Why should you be able to influence me?"

"Paul, really!" There was a tired exasperation in her voice. "You are a man. I am a woman. For Bertil, that makes it simple."

I realised that I was pacing the room as she spoke. So many things were now clear to me and, with the knowledge, I was swept by an overwhelming tenderness for this girl. I had been attracted by her before—more attracted than by any other woman. But now this was overlaid by a concern, a responsibility, a protectiveness, and a compassion. Was this what they called love? It was something I had never known before; and it was very great.

I was bitterly tempted to tell her the truth, but I knew I must hold back—for both our sakes.

" Lydia," I said gently, " can't we try again—you and I? "

She smiled. " Perhaps you really mean it this time, Paul. I do not know. You seem so—so like and yet unlike yourself. Perhaps I really want you to mean it. But there is something between us now that can never be erased. We are both guilty . . . At least I have never taken money.

" I do not understand your part in this—or why you betray your country, but how can I speak, who have no homeland I can call my own? You were drawn in for your own reasons. And I through concern for my parents. Now we are both trapped."

My voice was urgent. " I have been wanting to get out of all this for a long time. There is a way. I can give myself up; turn Queen's evidence."

" And Bertil? "

" He'd be arrested before he knew what was happening."

She shook her head. " No, Paul. It's a brave idea but there are many others here beside Bertil. They would know. And over there, in East Berlin, they would act without mercy on my parents. You would clear your conscience—and my parents would pay."

" There's an answer to that, too," I said, " if we stall for a bit. Anyone can get out of the Eastern Zone to the West. You just walk across—and you don't go back."

" And what happens then? " Her voice was bitter.

" The West German authorities won't send them back. You know that."

" No—they'd be dumped in some camp to rot for the rest of their lives—too old to do any work, too old to be useful. They have no special qualifications. No, Paul, they know there is danger for them and they wouldn't move without some positive support, some guarantee."

My mind was racing ahead now, and I knew what I must do.

" You mean, if I went to Berlin—? "

" *You* would do that? "

" Of course. All that we would have to do after we had got them over the border is to vouch for their identity; undertake they would be no charge on the state."

She shook her head. " It sounds fine, Paul. But they wouldn't trust you alone."

" Then you must come with me."

" I can't. Bertil has my passport. He keeps a check on all my movements. He may even follow me here."

Bertil. Again that name. Again the image in my mind of that pale, egg-shaped head, those loathsome hands. I was developing a very healthy hate for Bertil, and I said so, in words which broke the tension and brought a smile to her lips.

" Paul, bless you for being like that. Even if your brave English ideas won't work, bless you for having them. You know, Paul, you've changed so much lately."

It was then that I decided to tell her. I wanted her and I wanted her trust.

"Lydia," I said slowly, "I am going to tell you something that will be very hard to believe. But I want you to believe me, and to trust me, and to swear you will never repeat to a soul what I say."

"What is it?"

"Have I your promise?"

"You have, Paul." She was leaning forward, her lips parted, the neck of her blouse showing the creamy fullness where her breasts divided.

"Perhaps I am mad to put my life in your hands like this. Many lives. But you see, Lydia—" More than my life was involved. Paul . . . the Colonel . . . Bertil's spy ring. Too much. I needed a few more minutes to make up my mind, and so I said to her, "Lydia, I want to know how you got into all this, how you have let Bertil get such a hold on you? You may have told me before, but I want to hear it again now."

She did not even question. She turned on me eyes that were drained of emotion, and started talking in a low, dead voice. She had been born at Güstrow in the province of Mecklenburg in Germany. Her father was a liberal-minded schoolmaster, but the family managed to survive the Nazi era. One of her aunts had married an Englishman and settled in Huddersfield, and Lydia, with her mother, went to visit them in 1939. That July her father caught pneumonia and Lydia was left with the aunt while her mother returned home to nurse her husband. War broke out before she could return to fetch Lydia. Even the Red Cross could not contact her parents, and so the aunt and uncle adopted the child and brought her up as an English schoolgirl.

While Lydia talked on I watched her closely, as closely as any doctor ever studied a patient. I saw how her face softened as she spoke about growing up in England; the brief light faded from her eyes when she told me how, after the war, her aunt died, and she determined to trace her parents. Those cold clever men from Berlin had tracked her down. Her parents, they said, had survived the war—barely to exist, starving, in a one-room hovel in the Eastern Zone of Berlin. Would Lydia, they had asked, like to visit them. She did so and was horrified. Would she like to get them out? She would? But of course there would be delay. There was, however, a means of speeding things up; just a little co-operation with a higher authority. Just a few reports on certain aspects of public opinion in Britain. It was so harmless at first, and with the stakes so high she fell for it. By the time she realised what it really meant, she was hopelessly implicated—she was the lure and the contact for Paul; the link between Paul and Bertil.

"But what exactly is Bertil?" I asked.

"Who knows? He probably had some harmless title attached to a trade mission. But all he was really interested in was first getting a contact in the rocket station, and then draining that contact dry. From the way he spoke, he was obviously allowed to work on his own authority so long as he got results. And I have no illusions about why he talks of taking me back to Germany—

it would be simpler to arrange my disappearance there than in London."

"Then why don't you try to escape?"

"Do I deserve to escape? Any more than you do?"

There were tears in her eyes by now, and I had already made up my mind to trust this girl. I did not answer her question, but I said, "Lydia, I have something to tell you which will seem fantastic, but which I must make you believe. If you repeat to Bertil one word of what I am going to say, you will be murdering me, and others too." She was staring at me intently and she nodded, almost imperceptibly. I went on, "Did you really mean what you said—that I seem to have changed lately?"

"Yes."

"And how much do you know about my family life?"

"I have never thought about it. You have never encouraged questions, Paul."

"Did you know I had a twin brother?"

There was a puzzled look in her eyes, and she did not speak. "Yes, a twin brother," I plunged on. "An identical twin brother. So identical that you could not—cannot—tell us apart."

I put my hand on her arm. "I am not Paul Armitage, Lydia. I am his brother, Hugh."

It was too late to go back now and I felt an overwhelming relief overcoming all my earlier fears and hesitations. The story poured out of me—right from the earliest days when I discovered my strange telepathic link with Paul; through the evening when I had first met her on one of my impersonations of my brother. I told her it all: except that I loved her, and my eyes said that.

When I had finished, she asked, "You say that no one can tell you apart?"

"No one except my mother, and it is a kind of instinct with her."

"I can tell."

"You're being very feminine, Lydia. But—I'm sorry—you can't."

"Here!" She gestured me towards her and I leaned my head forward and, very gently, she ran her fingers through my hair, above my right ear, and my senses flared. Then she said, "I *can* tell. And I believe you."

"But how? I'm sorry, Lydia, but I don't understand."

"You see, I once had occasion to throw an ashtray at Paul, a heavy glass ashtray, and having been brought up at a splendid English girls' school, I threw it very accurately. And it left its mark on his scalp. The cut had to be stitched, and there was a scar that only Paul and I knew was still there."

She looked at me levelly and her lips twitched. She was smiling and so was I, and suddenly she was in my arms—laughing and crying at the same time, and I was stroking her head and making small soothing sounds into the tickling perfume of her hair.

"We have to be very careful," I whispered. "And whatever you do, remember to call me Paul."

She drew away from me a little and replied, " Yes, very careful, my dear . . . but I've thought of something. Your passport! Won't that give the game away? "

" The names won't. You see, we were both given our godfather's names—in a different order. I am Hugh Victor Paul; he is Paul Victor Hugh. The only snag is that my occupation is given as medical student, and Paul's as scientist, but I'll just have to get round that, somehow."

" You'll get round it. Are you . . . sorry . . . you took your brother's place? "

" No, Lydia, dear Lydia. I am glad. Very glad."

I leaned forward to kiss her. " We must be very careful," I repeated. " Behave to me exactly as you did before—and remember that Bertil thinks I am Paul."

" What do we do? " Her voice sounded lost again.

" We go on with this . . . together."

" Together."

At that moment the doorbell rang with a single, long, insistent peal.

Lydia rose to her feet, a hand to her head. " Who? "

" I don't know. But just stay where you are. You'll be all right."

The bell rang a second time before I could turn the latch. I did not step back this time, which was foolish because he gave me a solid shove in the chest and pushed past me, balancing on narrow feet that peeped from under a long raincoat. The pasty head, with eyebrows smeared over small eyes; the large white hands sliding like reptiles from the pigskin gloves which he stripped off and stuffed in a pocket . . . It was Bertil, and as he strode with confidence across the hall and into the drawing-room I knew with absolute certainty from the way he moved that he had been to the flat before.

I don't think he expected to see Lydia. There was only a fraction of a check in his stride as he turned the corner and saw her standing there, straight and quite still. He didn't say anything, just paused; then without turning, he jerked over his shoulder in a tone one would use to a dog, " Shut that front door."

Against my will, almost as in a trance, I closed the door and came back to join them.

They hadn't moved. They hadn't spoken. Lydia had gone very white.

Bertil's head turned slowly, taking in the whole room in steady, deliberate examination. " I don't like having to ring twice," he said. He swung round on Lydia. " I told you to phone him; not to come here. And I told you, Mr. Armitage, to phone *me*. You got that message? "

" Uh-huh."

" Good. At least *some* members of my organisation do as they are told. I didn't think old Fanny would let me down. She also

informs me that you have been transferred to another establishment; one very much concerned with the project we all have in mind. That was very clever of you. But your cleverness must not go to your head, Mr. Armitage. You must still obey orders. Why did you not phone? "

I said, " There wasn't anything to tell you. It's too soon. And I've been busy since I got back."

I made it over-casual, and he didn't like it.

His temper suddenly flared, and he made his first mistake.

" Busy? Yes, I should think you would have plenty to make you busy. Have you been showing Lydia round the flat? Have you, for instance, shown her the bedroom? "

" No. Why don't *you* show her? You know the way." Still casual.

" Certainly I will. Come, Lydia, there's something that may interest you." This man had such a hold on her that she was as if hypnotised. Without a glance at me, she followed him from the room.

They seemed to be gone a long time. There was nothing I could do except wait, hoping that every moment she was away with him would not poison all that I had tried to build up between us. All the evidence that a woman had shared Paul's bedroom was still there. Lydia would see and would know about Paul, and it would be a shock to her.

When they came back, it was just as I thought it would be. Bertil first, teetering on those tiny feet, poker-faced, but with a puzzled wariness in his eyes. Lydia following, expressionless, too, but now with a bright spot burning on each cheek.

She didn't look at me; she just said, in a low voice, " Paul . . . Paul, how could you? "

" Lydia is upset," said Bertil, slowly and precisely. " She didn't expect to find that you were keeping a mistress." He paused and stared at me: that look of wariness still there, but now greatly magnified.

" Where is she, by the way? "

I silently complimented him on the calmness of the question. " Who? "

" The girlfriend, or whatever you call her." As he spoke, he had taken out and lit a cigarette.

I watched, fascinated, as the spent match was broken into the shape of a circle before being flicked into an ashtray. I don't think he was even aware he did it.

" She's gone away . . . for a bit." I couldn't look at Lydia.

" I congratulate you, Armitage. Really, your new cleverness becomes more apparent at every turn. How did you manage to *get* her away? "

He knew that I knew what had happened; he also knew that in some way his plan of pinning a murder on me, Paul, had gone wrong; that, in some miraculous way, I had managed to get rid of the evidence.

"You must have had a lot of difficulty in getting her out of the place," he said softly.

I didn't answer. I just looked at Lydia. She seemed to be completely defeated by him. She walked towards the door. She said, "I've had enough. I'm going."

"Oh, no—you're not!" It was almost incredible the way his voice could change so suddenly to menace.

"And why not?"

"Because I say not. You are going to listen to me. I was worried the other night when you came to see me. I knew of certain facts, goings-on, if you like, that you, Lydia, had no knowledge of and which I thought should be checked on for your own peace of mind. Someone had to warn you not to get too involved.

"I could see there was more than comradeship in your mothering of our bright friend here, and I wanted the team to keep up its happy relations. So, looking after your interests, my dear, I came here to find out what was really happening. I'm sorry to have to tell you this—but there had been an argument, a heated argument. It finished with this poor girl being stopped from any more talk . . . for good. There had been the simple expedient of strangling her with one of her own stockings."

Lydia said, "Oh no!"

"You might be the next. So I'm just warning you, in case you are prevailed upon to move in and share this delightful apartment."

"Lydia! It isn't true. There was someone here, someone who has gone. But I didn't do *anything*. I was telling you something before he came in, wasn't I?

"Look, I can prove that I never came back here, the night before last, when I dropped you from that taxi at Marble Arch. I can prove it. And I can prove that someone else was here. There was a girl living here . . . I admit that. But she was nothing to do with me."

"Don't talk to me any more. I'm so tired of everything." She had reached the door now.

"But—"

Bertil cut in, "Lydia, I told you that you couldn't go. Now sit down and do as you're told. It's natural that you are a little upset at this news, but you must remember that more than sentiment binds us together in this business—the cold hard facts that we know about each other."

She came back and sat down, still not looking at me. "What do you want of me, Bertil?"

"Nothing at present, my dear. Just sit still and wait. I'm interested in our source of information at the moment."

He swung round on me. "Now . . . how much data have you got?"

"Got—?"

"Hidyn. You know what I'm talking about. I want all the dope on it, and quickly."

I said, "You've sent Lydia to ask already. I've told her. And

I tell you that it's too soon, too dangerous to try to get it down on paper. But I've got the basis . . ."

"Where—?"

"Here." I tapped my forehead. "And it's going to stay here. Until you stop these blackmailing strong-arm tactics."

"Strong-arm . . ." It was said very softly. He didn't seem to be talking to me, but to himself. "You don't know the meaning of the word, my fine friend." He went over to the fireplace and picked up the poker from the empty grate.

Those small, white, pudgy hands didn't seem to have any strength in them, but I saw the sinews knot like cords on the back of his wrists and he bent the thing into a half loop, without effort, without so much as a change of expression or quickening of his breath. Then he threw the twisted circle back into the grate, where it fell against the rest of the fire-irons with a clang. "That was quite good metal," he said. "Your neck would be far softer."

For a moment nothing happened. The three of us stood in a close, tight circle, just waiting for what would come next.

Bertil went quickly towards the telephone, picked up the receiver, and started to dial. He didn't finish, though. Halfway through the series of numbers, he stopped suddenly, bending forward to stare at something quite close to him. He seemed to stiffen. . . to freeze. Then very slowly and carefully he replaced the instrument on its cradle.

The telephone was on a small table by the wall; beside it, closer to the edge, was a squat lamp with a big shade, the base in the form of a wickerwork basket, the flex-cord running out at the side and down to a plug on the skirting-board.

One of Bertil's white hands came out and touched it, then the other, feeling down the length of it delicately, prising the two intertwined cords apart. There was another wire there, a very thin one nearly the same colour, that had been threaded in between them: my eyes followed his search down to the plug in the wall, and the thin wire didn't stop there. It ran on, almost invisible against the fitted carpet, to disappear into the junction-box where the telephone cable reached the floor.

There was a crash as the table-lamp was tipped over on its side; then no sound but the hissing of his breath as he fished in the bottom of its false base; a grunt, and he had hooked out a thick, round, black disc with a perforated grille on one side. It was a microphone.

I never saw a man move so fast, make a decision so quickly. In seconds he had followed the lead along the floor—then he turned and lunged at me.

A steel band tightening round your neck is not pleasant at any time. When you can feel it is human, is utterly ruthless, and directed towards you only, the physical pain becomes a minor thing compared with the mental terror.

I don't remember the hurt of those hands that were squeezing my life away so relentlessly, with such superhuman strength; only,

through the red clouds that flooded my eyes, the roaring of the thunder that grew in my ears, that hateful voice hissing at me, "You little rat! You dirty, lying little traitor! So you've had the place wired for sound, have you? Well, it hasn't worked, has it? And even if it had, you wouldn't have had long to enjoy your triumph . . . your triumph . . . your triumph . . ." The last seemed to repeat like a cracked gramophone record before everything exploded into sparks, and a spinning down into a void of darkness.

I came to with someone throwing water in my face. My throat and neck were horribly sore. I was on the sofa, and Lydia, close, kneeling, was holding a glass of brandy to my lips. I had a drink and felt a little better, turned my head on the cushion, to see Bertil, coat open and dangling, hands thrust in pockets, staring into space.

He said, "I owe you an apology, Armitage. Before I lost my temper, I should have checked the facts. First, the look on your face when you saw that contraption should have told me you had no knowledge that it was there—unless you are a very, very good actor, which I doubt. Second, as Lydia here has pointed out to me, this microphone is not connected with anything *inside* the flat; so there is no use in your having it unless you are in collusion with the authorities—a situation that, in the circumstances in which you are placed, I very much doubt."

"I swear I had no idea that thing was there . . . no idea at all, until you found it."

He looked at me long and carefully. I think the truth in my voice convinced him—and the last part was absolutely sincere, for I hadn't the faintest idea when the Colonel had managed to connect the thing.

"All right." He came over and pulled me to my feet. "I believe you. Now . . ." He was gripping me by the collar of my jacket and shaking me slowly. "Think, my friend. When was the last time that anyone like the telephone, gas, or electricity people, came into this flat?"

"I don't know . . . there was always . . . someone here . . ." Even as I spoke in jerks, I remembered that part and tried to look towards the bedroom. I heard Lydia's breath go out in a short, soft sigh.

"And you never noticed anything out of place?" He had let go now, and stood very close to me, rubbing those hateful hands gently together.

"That wire, you mean? No, I swear I haven't. It can't have been there for long."

"So, the microphone is wired to the telephone, which means they are keeping constant watch at the exchange. Calls as well. Who have you phoned recently?"

"Only my mother."

"No one else?" Again, menace was there as he took a short step forward. Our eyes were level, and our faces almost touching. I noticed for the first time what a peculiar colour his eyes were:

green, with little flecks of colour that were almost orange in them.

"No one else."

Again, for some extraordinary reason, he seemed to believe me. "Then there can be no harm done—yet. But they're watching you, my friend, which doesn't particularly concern me, except that the trail might lead in my direction. And that must not happen. So . . . we go."

"Go?" I don't think I quite understood what he meant for a moment.

"Yes, go. All three of us. You with the knowledge you already have, from which you will have ample opportunity, with expert help, to get the final result.

"You, Lydia, have served your usefulness here. Actually, you are a liability to leave to the tender mercies of those who may be hot on the scent. You will come, too. I know you would like to see that rather troublesome family of yours, to satisfy yourself they are still alive and well cared for."

She didn't say a word.

"So we go," said Bertil. "Quick . . . as we stand now, and without fuss. Any fuss on the part of either of you would be a great mistake."

I stared at him. "Go where? But I've got no clothes together. No money. And I just can't walk out on a job like that. They'll be searching for me."

He looked at me patiently, almost gently, as one would remonstrate with an argumentative child. "You have no option. Leave a note to say that you are going away for a few days for personal reasons. By the time they have caught up on that one, you will be far beyond their reach, quite safe. The same thing applies to clothes. They will be provided for you.

"And money—someone in my profession always keeps a stock of money of the right kind on him, just in case of emergencies. I have plenty for all three of us, and enough small change in sterling."

Lydia spoke for the first time. "You don't expect me to go anywhere . . . just like this?"

"I do, my dear."

"But—" She looked at him helplessly, almost as a complete stranger.

I was trying to think, desperately stalling for time. There was only one chance.

"What about passports?"

"I hold Lydia's. And I presume you have one."

"Yes."

"Then get it."

"It's in the drawer of the desk," I said. "And I think it might look better if I took something with me—at least my shaving-tackle."

"All right. I give you five minutes." He looked at his watch. "This device has been off the air for just that time. Soon they will act to find out why. And that is the thing I want to avoid."

I could hardly believe that this showdown had been so short. It seemed an age since I first saw that extra wire.

I didn't answer him, but went to collect Paul's briefcase that was lying beside the sofa. I made a futile gesture to try to scoop up some of Paul's maps. It was no good because, though nothing had been said, I soon found that he had seen, that he knew.

"You won't be wanting any of those," he said softly. "I know the way."

I went into the bathroom, shutting the door right in his face. There was so little time, so much I wanted to leave behind in the way of clues.

I started collecting Paul's shaving-kit: stuffing it into the briefcase as I stared round me in hopeless futility. It was such a small bathroom, not much chance to hide anything.

There was a cabinet under the sink, and I opened that. The usual cleaning-cloths and scrubbing brushes were there, together with an enamel jug and a flat tin of one of those sink-cleaning compounds. There was a faint hope—perhaps someone might search.

I went to the toilet roll and tore off a sheet, pulled out my pen and wrote as fast as I could. *B. here. Has found microphone. Scared, and taking L. and me some place with passports.*

It only took a second, and I hoped it would be understood—if it was found. I took out the tin of cleaning compound and stuck the flimsy note into the top of the paste, then screwed back the lid a little crookedly; for good measure, I took a spent match from the ashtray on the end of the bath, half-broke it in five places, and dropped it on the shelf in front of the tin. By the time I had closed the cupboard, pulled the lavatory chain to cover any delay, and unlocked the door, I don't think three minutes had elapsed in all.

Bertil's face was creased with impatience when I returned. He was about to speak when the telephone rang. He was instantly at the table and, with a great effort at control, saying politely, "Yes, he's here. Who is it?"

He put his hand over the mouthpiece and whispered to me, "It's your mother. Talk to her—but be very careful. Say you're going away for a few days. And remember I shall be right behind you."

He was, and something small and hard was pressing against my back.

My mother's voice had only a slight tremor. "Where are you off to, dear?"

"I'm sorry, I can't tell you—rather hush-hush; but I'll try to send you a postcard."

"You *must* try to let me know. A friend of yours rang and he's very worried. Said something about a means of checking up on you having been disconnected. He said he wants to keep in touch but daren't come too close, and he was afraid you might have to go away."

I hoped Bertil could not hear any of this, and I cut off quickly

with, " All right, Mother. Don't worry. I'll send you that post-card."

Bertil stepped back. " That was prudent—and satisfactory. But what was all that talk? What was she saying? "

" She was impressing on me the inadvisability of talking to strange men and the importance of taking a change of underwear when I go on a journey. O.K.? "

" What did you say her address was? "

I hadn't said, but I told him and he wrote it down carefully in a notebook. " Just in case you are not in a position to send that postcard," he explained, " I will send it for you."

He turned out the lights, gave a last careful look round the flat and together—Lydia still stiff and silent—we went downstairs.

The man at the wheel of Bertil's fast saloon was the manservant who had opened the door to Lydia and me when we had visited Bertil's house, and as soon as Bertil gave him the first directions I knew what our destination was to be. North Circular Road . . . Chelmsford . . . Colchester . . . and Harwich.

Ahead was—what? The unknown. But somewhere in that unknown was my brother: lost and desperate. And somewhere, too, were the parents of the girl who sat so still and tensed at my side. We seldom spoke and I had plenty of time to think on that drive through the sleeping night.

Mostly I was thinking about Paul—trying to penetrate his mind to discover why—*why* he, my twin brother, had become a traitor. Somehow he must be brought back—and I was the only person who could bring him.

At the hotel where we stopped for breakfast, I could have handed Bertil over to the police and been done with the whole perilous affair. It would have been easy for me to have ended it all—abruptly and simply. But there was Paul—and without Bertil we had no hope whatever of tracing him. And for Paul's sake and Lydia's, I had to go on.

There was, too, my hate for Bertil. I had got my teeth into this thing and I was going to see it through. I might even enjoy it, I thought, my fists involuntarily clenching as I looked at the back of his thick neck below the preposterous grey hat when, at last, we waited by the ticket office at Harwich while he paid for three fares.

I heard him say, " Berlin—singles, please," and then he jerked his head and Lydia and I followed him. Down the long, covered gangways smelling of wet wood and disinfectant; the dirty side windows showing only a half light; feet echoing on the boards. Ahead was the second barrier with the desks and the uniformed officials that signified Passport Control. The stream of passengers divided: British on the left, foreign passports on the right.

Bertil hesitated, fumbled in a pocket and handed Lydia her passport. " Here is yours," he said. " I have to go the other side." He gave me a warning look and then moved over to join the right-hand queue. Fewer people were there and he was through and

waiting before Lydia, who was just in front of me, had her passport examined and stamped by the man at the desk.

There was another official standing just beyond, his arms folded, his eyes searching the queue with that penetrating look which makes the most innocent wonder if there is any reason why they shouldn't have a guilty conscience.

I wondered, Was it worth trying? I fumbled with my passport and dropped it so that it slid towards this official's feet. We bent together and for a moment as I picked up the passport our heads were close. "*Opal*," I said softly—the password the Colonel had given me.

The man gave no sign, but now he stood very close behind the official at the desk to whom I presented my passport. He thumbed the pages; his colleague leaned forward almost imperceptibly; and then, "I think you had better step into the office, please, sir. This does not appear to be quite in order."

I walked through a door marked *Private*, not even wondering about the thoughts that must be racing through the heads of Lydia and Bertil behind me.

It was a small room, sparsely furnished, and behind the bare desk was a burly, red-faced man who looked like a country policeman. The immigration official who had followed me in spoke for the first time as he put my passport on the desk. "Mr. Armitage, sir."

"Oh yes, we've been expecting you. I won't be long with him, Simpson. But hold the boat until he makes up his mind."

I said, "My friends out there. They will be wondering . . ."

"That's all right. Simpson, tell them—you know, the other two we had descriptions of—that there is a slight irregularity in Mr. Armitage's passport. We are just trying to put it in order." There was no answer, but the door behind me opened and closed again quietly.

The big man shuffled the papers on his desk and held up a small memo form. "All ports were alerted early this morning for you and your—er—colleagues," he said pleasantly. "I don't know what all the flap is about—and I'm not interested. The orders were to get you alone, give you a message, and take action according to your answer. The message is from the Colonel. It says, *You have done your bit and there may be great danger if you go on. Now is the time to say Yes or No.*"

I had already been over all this in my mind.

"I'll go on," I said.

"Good. Now I'll give you the rest quickly: we don't want to keep people waiting. The Colonel is pretty certain where you are going, and if it is Berlin—"

I nodded. "It is. I heard it mentioned at the ticket office."

"Good again—it makes the rest much shorter. Any help you want, anything you want to be passed on, go to a café called the Maüse Turm in the Kurfurstendamm. He says the café looks like a doll's house from the outside. Use the same password, but

only to the *old* woman behind the bar, and when she is alone. Otherwise she pretends she can't speak English. Got that? The Maüse Turm in the Ku'damm. Now I'll stamp your passport and that's all. Except—good luck! "

I was outside the door again, through the barrier, and facing Bertil and Lydia.

And this time it was not the girl who claimed my attention, but Bertil. He was showing the first crack. He was scared. The egg-shaped face under his preposterous grey hat was paler than ever; there were beads of sweat pricking at the sides of the mouth; the eyes, for the first time, were evasive. And it made me feel good

I felt even better when I heard his voice. " What did they want? "

" I don't know."

" What do you mean, you don't know? " He realised his voice was too high and, glancing round nervously, lowered it. " You must know what they wanted."

" They just checked my passport against a long list, told me they thought there'd been an irregularity, but there wasn't. They stamped it, and let me go."

He was getting even more jumpy. " Did they ask you any other questions? Where you were going? Or why? "

" Vaguely. And as I didn't know the right answers, I simply said I was going to Amsterdam on holiday."

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He had to be satisfied, for it was time to join the ship. My delay had made us the last on board. We stood in a row, leaning on the rail and watching the business of casting off. Soon the coastline was fading into the grey haze and the sea was getting up: short, steep, and black. You could hear and feel the waves hitting the bows, and I enjoyed it: Paul and I were both good sailors.

I turned to Lydia, so silent beside me, her chin on her hand staring at nothing. "Are you a good sailor?" She nodded.

I looked the other way and saw with delight that there was no need to ask Bertil. He was holding the rail with both hands and his body swayed gently. There was a sheen of sweat on his face; his eyes were half closed; and he had that unmistakable look of wishing very devoutly that he was dead in a dry and motionless grave.

A freak puff of air blew to us from the centre of the ship, over the open engine-room hatches: hot, moist, and reeking of oil. It finished him. He pressed a handkerchief to his mouth, mumbled through it something about, "Don't move . . . don't talk to anyone," and leant over the rail. He lay back, wilting, in his chair for the rest of the crossing.

Bertil did not enjoy that trip, but he managed to stay close to Lydia and me. His colour began to return almost as soon as we docked and he shepherded us on to a waiting train. I read the names on the side of the coaches: ARNHEM, OSNABRUCK, MINDEN, HANNOVER, STENDAL, BERLIN, and I thought desperately of Paul.

Rheine . . . the German frontier; a cursory examination of papers and hand-baggage on the train. Osnabrück . . . and darkness had come; nothing to look at, nothing to do except to listen to the rhythm of the wheels: *Berlin, Berlin, Berlin.*

It was the jerk of the stopping train that half wakened me, and then something else that brought me abruptly back to reality. The lights, they were harsher, brighter than any I had noticed at the earlier stops. I peered out of the window.

A crowd from the train was streaming along the platform, shuffling patiently forward, their faces pallid and corpse-like in the glare. Watching them with a steady concentration were men in a uniform I had not seen before. Dark green.

And Bertil's voice, confident again now, came from behind me. "We get out here. It is the frontier."

"But I thought—"

"You thought you had already crossed it. So you did. But that was the Western one. This is the true frontier—that of East Germany."

We followed him down on to the platform. It was cool, and I saw Lydia shiver. I took her arm and held it close against my body. We stood like that, silently, while Bertil went to the nearest policeman, showed him something from an inner pocket, and then marched to the head of the queue and disappeared from view.

When he came into sight again he was accompanied by another uniform, and the guards stiffened as they passed. Bertil gave us a

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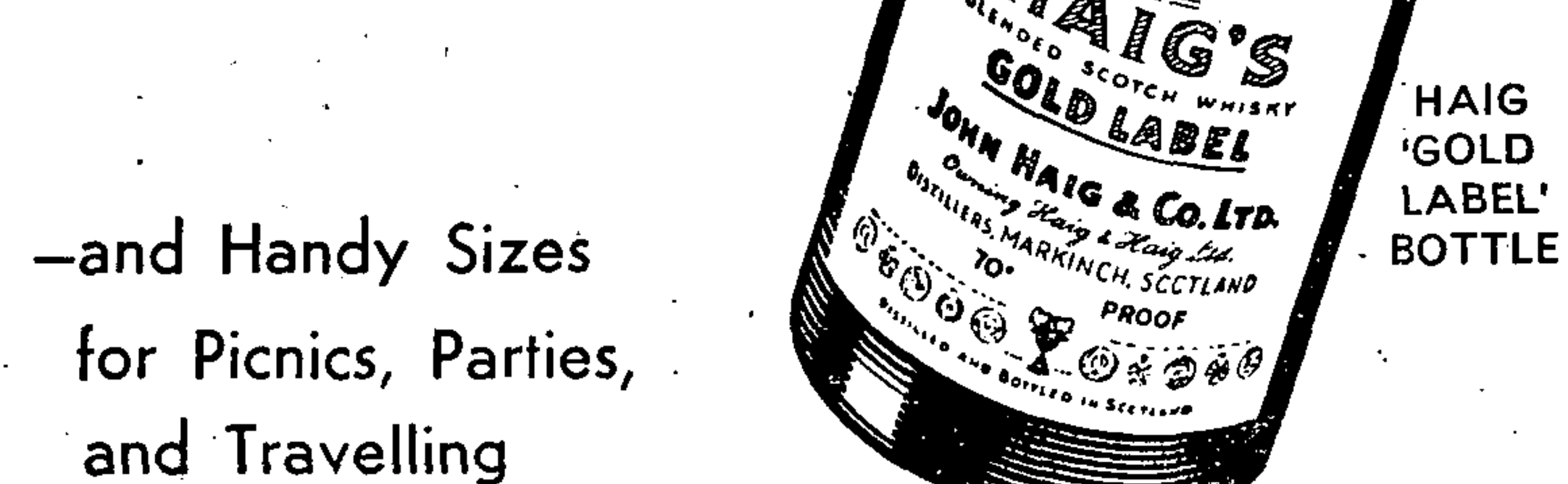

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slow smile. " I have influence here. We get priority. Come with me to the front of the line."

There was no muttering, no protest from the crowd—just an apathetic shuffling back; and when we got to the front of the queue we were faced by a wide desk with another of those green uniforms sitting at it.

Behind him, in the corner of the railed-in space, another figure was slouched on a chair, tilting in it so that his jackboots only just touched the ground. His peaked cap was tipped forward over his eyes; the uniform was also green, but it was a drab olive shade. I did not have to look at the star in his cap to know his nationality: Russian.

The man at the desk said, very politely, " Passports, please. And would you be kind enough to empty the contents of your hand-luggage on the table? " As I tipped out my razor and toothbrush, he was thumbing over the pages of my passport carefully. " You are a British subject? ".

" Yes."

" You are Mr. Armitage? "

" Yes."

I felt my palms sweating. The occupation, medical student, would convey nothing to the man questioning me and translating the answers to the Russian behind him. But it might mean everything to Bertil, standing beside me.

The polite voice continued, " Your first name and your—"

I opened my mouth to interrupt him, but the words were drowned in the scream of the engine whistle, the clank of couplings, and the hissing of steam as the train moved on to its new position beyond the barrier. I nodded at the movements of the official's mouth.

When the noise died, I heard the next question clearly. " You wish to travel in Eastern Germany for pleasure, sir? "

I glanced at Bertil and I nodded firmly. " Then we have pleasure to give you a transit visa." A thump, and my passport was stamped.

Lydia went through the same treatment, but Bertil waved aside the formalities.

I turned towards the far end of the platform, ready to board the train again, but a hand took my arm and guided me away. A voice said, " This way, please."

I shook off the hand. " Look, Bertil," I said, " I warned you before that I don't like any of your bloody nonsense. What goes on? "

He smiled. " Relax, my friend. You have been co-operating very well. I do not advise you to spoil it now. We could not have you and the charming Lydia suffering the discomfort of the rest of the train journey to Berlin. From now on we travel by car. A very comfortable one has been put at our disposal. This way." And, like a host displaying the furniture when the last of the hire purchase has been paid, he steered us to a handsome black Mercedes saloon.

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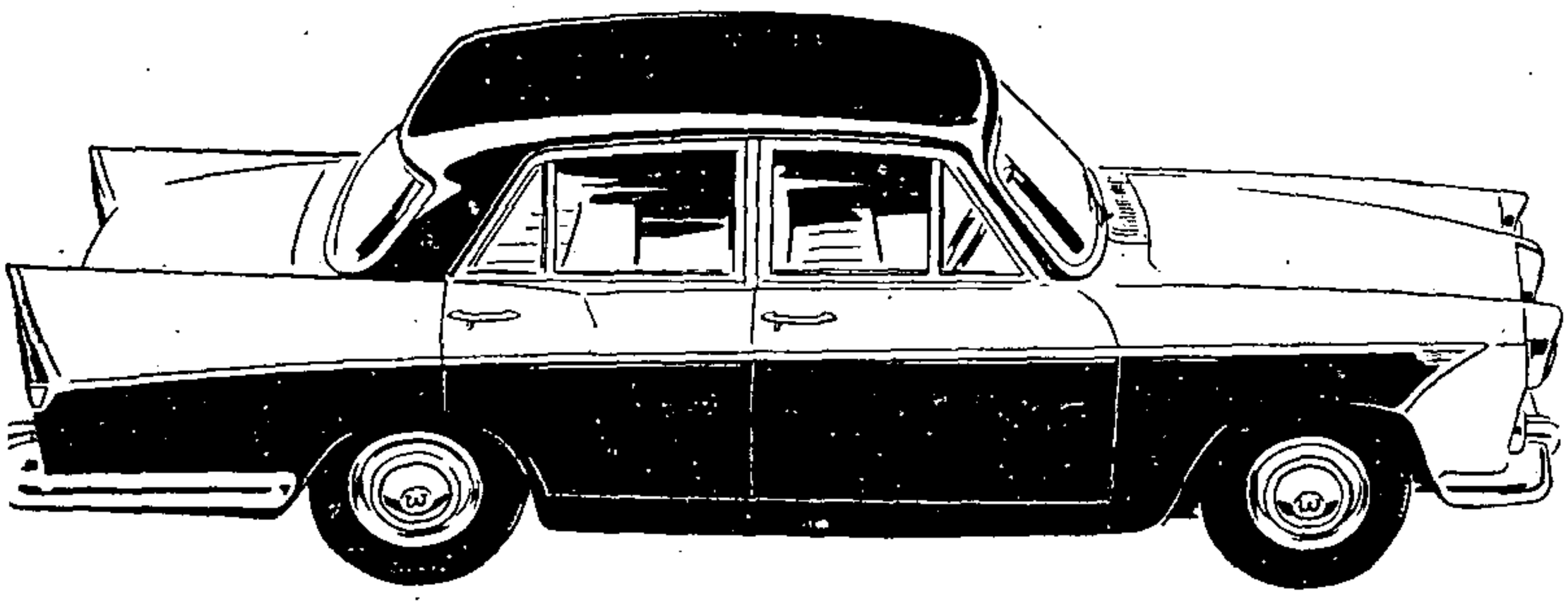

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Lydia and I were ushered into the back, while Bertil got into the front seat beside the chauffeur. There was a partition between us; and it was only when we had left the lights of the station that I realised there were no opening handles on the inside of our doors. I turned to tell Lydia, but her hand bit into my knee and she pointed to the partition and mouthed the word, " Microphone."

I nodded and sat back.

She leaned her head against my shoulder and seemed to sleep. I slipped my arm round her, and she nestled beneath it. She was very warm and very small. My eyes closed and I drifted into sleep before I could even wonder about tomorrow.

Through the night we drove and on into the dawn. We stopped for a quick breakfast and Bertil told us our next meal would be in Berlin. We drove on again.

The car was fast and the roads were empty—until we rounded a bend and caught the cloud of dust raised by a convoy ahead. We did not slacken speed. I could see that it was a string of five-ton lorries keeping plumb in the centre of the road. Now we were closing up to the rear lorry—I could make out the hammer and sickle stencilled on the tailboard. The grit spewed up by its wheels rattled against our bonnet.

Bertil mouthed instructions to our driver. His horn started blaring: on, off, on, off. But the lorry stayed on the crown of the road as it lunged into the long curve of a bend. As our driver swung out to try to pass, I glanced out of my window. A few inches from my face a low stone parapet seemed to shimmer as we flashed past it. Beyond the parapet: a tree-lined drop into the valley.

Our horn was still screaming. Lydia was sitting forward on the edge of her seat, and through her window I could see only the churning tyres of the back wheels of the lorry. They seemed enormous.

Bertil put a hand on the driver's shoulder and yelled something; and the driver hesitated for that fatal moment, neither bold enough to pass nor decisive enough to brake.

In that instant everything seemed to happen. It was as if I was detached, watching it all. There was the scrape of metal against metal on one side; the rasp of the parapet rocks on the other; a shuddering lurch as we pushed through them.

" Put your head down," I screamed to Lydia, and threw her flat across my lap, and doubled myself over her.

The sickening plunge, the smack and snarl as the car bounced through the young trees, and the shattering of glass and the tearing and the rending. And then sudden stillness save for the hum of the convoy dying away into the distance and a trickling, dripping sound from the front of the car.

I kicked at the door nearest me. The twisting of the chassis must have smashed the lock, because the door swung open. I dragged Lydia out and half walked, half carried her to a bank that would be out of range if the petrol exploded.

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I began flexing my muscles and moving my limbs and, to my surprise, found that I was more or less intact—apart from a feeling that an entire football team had walked over me with their boots on.

I examined Lydia, more carefully, and decided that she had escaped with nothing worse than shock and bruises. And then I walked back and looked at what was left of the front of the car.

The driver was slumped forward. The steering column had entered his chest and emerged jaggedly from his back. I had never even heard his voice or known his name; and now I did not need a second glance to know that I never would.

To a layman, Bertil would have looked worse than he was: the gash over one eye, the strangled breathing, the thready pulse. But his pupils were normal, there was no blood from nose or ears, and the heartbeat, though faint, was steady. He was knocked out cold —but he would survive. Unless . . .

Suddenly, as I looked down at this man, a blind fury tore at my mind. An instant's pressure on his throat and the breathing would stop. It was easy, and God knows it was deserved. My face was twitching and I could feel a pulse beating in my temple.

I don't know how long I stood like that, hating him, torn with the urge to destroy him. But suddenly the rage passed and I had not touched him; and I was glad because I knew he was a link in the chain that could lead me to my brother, Paul.

I bent and rifled his pockets until I found Lydia's passport. His wallet was stuffed with money, both East and West marks. I took all the valuable Western ones and left the others. Then I walked back to Lydia.

She was dusty and dishevelled, but she had stopped shaking and she looked at me with helpless eyes that made me feel seven feet tall.

"What do we do now?" she asked.

"Do? Walk to Berlin, my love. That's all." I kissed her lightly and helped her to her feet; then I pointed up through the pines to the road. "Let's go!"

I could not guess how far from Berlin we were, but I knew from the sun that the road headed north-east, and Lydia told me that sooner or later we must cross the main roads from Hamburg and the north that led to Berlin.

Was there a check-post at the border and, if so, how would we get through? I did not know, and I had learnt very quickly in these last few days to face troubles as they came and beat them one by one. All I knew was that Lydia and I were alive and that somewhere ahead was Paul; and that we were going to find him.

The hills had levelled now, the country opening, the road straight between fields, with an occasional farmhouse. Far to our right was a haze of smoke from many chimneys over a dark blur that looked like a town. There was more traffic on the road, and nowhere to hide, so we kept walking and nobody asked any questions.

We had been walking for about an hour when we saw ahead a wooded thicket on the left of the road; on the other verge, a white sign. "Crossroads," said Lydia, and quickened her step.

We looked at the sign that told us Berlin was only 40 kms. away and I told Lydia, "We'd better go over to the other side of the crossing to see if we can get a lift."

As we skirted the edge of the thicket I could just see the road junction, the busy stream of traffic flowing in both directions across our path, when I heard the voices. They seemed to come from the middle of the bushes, and they were just voices: I could not make out any language. I pushed Lydia farther into cover.

"Stay there," I whispered. "This might be difficult."

I crawled in through the brambles and saw the drab canvas tops of five lorries grouped in a clearing on the side of the main road. I was still staring at them, seeking the ominous hammer and sickle sign, when there drifted to me the tang of burning wood and the never-forgotten smell of frying sausages.

A Cockney voice said, "Aren't those bangers done yet, Sarge?" And I knew that we were safe.

I rose and walked confidently into the clearing, my eyes taking in the yellow and blue of the R.A.S.C. flash on the trucks and the five British soldiers grouped round the fire. They were so deep in their concentration on the sizzling sausages that they did not hear my approach, and when I said a polite, "Good morning," five heads jerked up and five mouths dropped.

The sergeant recovered first. As soon as he took the responsibility of replying, the other four resumed their contemplation of their meal.

"Good morning," he answered in a cautious voice.

"Are you going to Berlin?"

"What the flaming 'eck is it to you where I'm going, even if it is Berlin? That's where the flaming road leads."

"I need a lift, Sergeant: me and a friend."

"Sorry—no civilians on W.D. transport."

"I'm in a jam, Sergeant. Can't you help? I'm British—"

"I don't care if you're Mr. 'Arold Macmillan. No civilians on—"

"All right, I know," I said. We had walked a few paces from the other soldiers, and I took out a handful of Bertil's money.

"You 'aven't got enough to buy my flaming stripes!" the sergeant said contemptuously.

I kept the notes in my hand, and said, "Look—I've got a girl over there. We're in love and we've got to get to West Berlin. She's British, but she's got people in the East and the police will try to stop her."

"The police?" For the first time the sergeant's face showed interest. "The East ones? Those green bastards?"

I nodded.

"Never liked any flaming copper," he said, "and least of all those flaming green uns. I'd like to help you, chum; but we're

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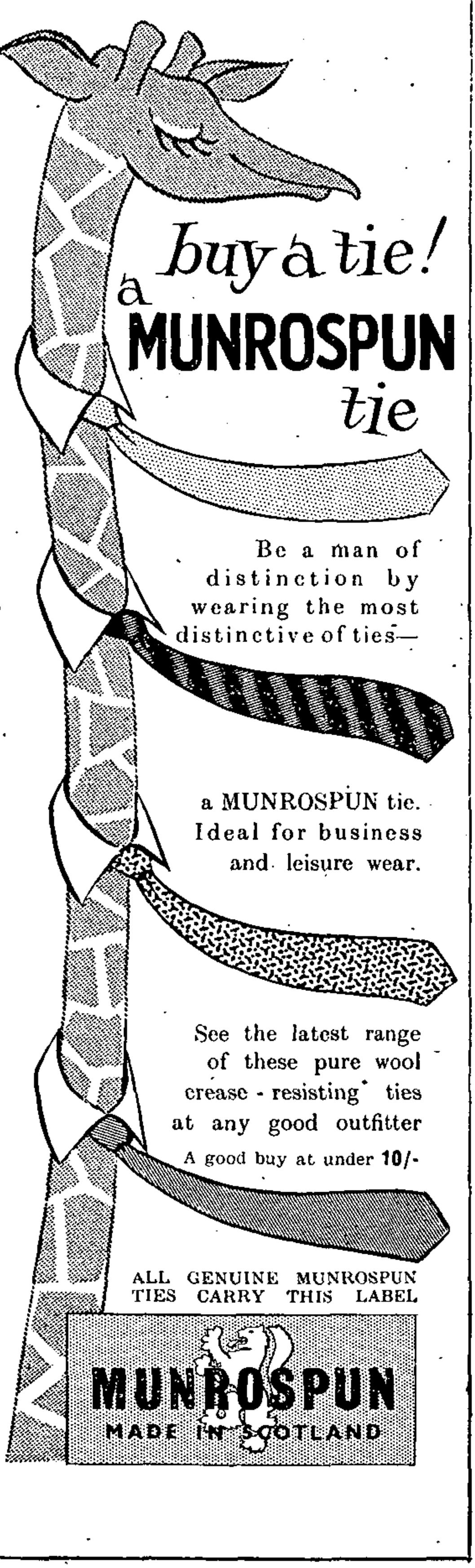
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carrying new jeeps in from Hamburg, and I can't be a party to anything. However—" he gazed at some distant point over my head—" however, if while I was concentrating on my breakfast, you and your girl climbed into the back of that lorry *there*, and hid under the tarpaulin that's stowed in front of the jeep, I wouldn't know, would I? "

" No," I agreed gravely.

" And if anything happened, you'd say I didn't know, wouldn't you? "

" Of course."

" In you get, then. Lie low. No smoking. And shut up till I tell you to get out."

" Thank you," I said as he turned to rejoin his companions. His hand came into contact with mine and extracted the bundle of notes.

" Don't mention it," said the sergeant.

It was not the most comfortable ride I have ever had, although it was eased by the mug of tea that appeared over the tailboard before we moved off; and after that it was eased by the closeness of Lydia curled beside me under the tarpaulin.

About an hour had passed, and I was wondering why I had ever doubted that I loved the soft sweetness of her, when the brakes went on, the lorry jolted to a halt, and voices were raised in argument. Then they died away and a solitary voice was left quietly singing, " Keep your feet still, Geordie, hinny . . ."

It was my sergeant.

He went on with his song, but using warning words of his own. " There's a flap on, Geordie, and they want to search the trucks, but I've said they can jump in the flaming lake first, and they've gone to get my officer from the post." He really made it sound quite musical.

I pulled the tarpaulin right over our heads then, and Lydia and I lay very still.

I heard the click of the sergeant's boots, and a Sandhurst voice asking him, " What's the trouble, Sergeant? "

" Convoy 606, sir, proceeding from Hamburg to Berlin. Said they wanted to search the vehicles. I told them they could go— I said they had no right under the Allied agreement, sir. Here's my movement order."

The voices moved away, a mixture of German and English now. A rasping sound as the tailsheet of the truck was thrown back, and my arm tightened round Lydia as I sensed, rather than saw, the light that flooded in.

The British officer's voice said, " This is exceeding my orders and your powers. You can *look* and see there is only a jeep on each of these lorries. If you try to search I shall get on to my headquarters."

Five slow seconds, and a different voice grunted, " In order." Another rasp as the sheet was relashed—and we moved off again.

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We had crossed the border into that island of the free: West Berlin.

A quarter of an hour of gear changes and halts, and I guessed we must be in the centre of the city. Then the engine was cut and the sergeant's voice said, " We're in a sidestreet. I'm having a breakdown. Go up the back, and when I bang on the side, get the flaming hell out of it quick. I've never seen you! "

I stuffed fifty marks into the empty tea mug, and Lydia and I eased our cramped limbs out of the tarpaulin. A quick rap, and we were down into the street.

We stood on the pavement for a second, looking back. Just a British truck in a sidestreet; two khaki-clad figures peering at the open bonnet. They didn't want to know us; we couldn't know them. We walked away.

Lydia clung to my arm as if we were walking down Piccadilly, but she was yawning from fatigue as she said, " I shall have to get some clothes and tidy myself before we can do much more. We're too conspicuous like this."

The evidence of the Mercedes crash was showing in the rent in her skirt and the dust on my suit, so I stopped a taxi and told the driver to find us a quiet, cheap hotel.

Lydia looked at me with surprise. " You speak Germán? "

" Enough. Just about the same as Paul. We learnt a bit at school, and then we used to go on cycling holidays in Germany at one time."

The taxi took us down the Budapesterstrasse, past the gaunt ruins of the memorial church, into the straight glittering way of the Ku'damm; then it turned off to the left, through narrower streets, and dropped us at a quiet hotel in the Lietzenburger.

The woman at the desk showed no surprise at our appearance or our lack of luggage.

When we had been shown our single rooms, I stopped at the door of Lydia's for a moment and gave her a sheaf of notes from my pocket. " Go out and buy what you need. Then have a bath and a rest, and I'll see you in the lobby at six."

" It seems an awful lot of money."

" It is. It's Bertil's. Go on and spend it! "

I left her and did the same myself. Then, shaved, and with a new shirt awaiting me, I indulged in the heaven of a long, very hot bath. I have always been able to think clearest in a bath. At home I used to study my medical books there. At home . . . it seemed a lifetime away since the events of the last twenty-four hours.

I let my mind roam free—back to England, to my life with my brother when we were younger and, slowly, slowly, I felt his presence creeping back into my mind. That link with the one who was a part of me, the mirror of me, slowly formed itself again.

I *knew* that he had not murdered the girl in his flat, just as surely as I knew that he had sold his country's secrets to Bertil. I knew he had panicked and fled.

And I felt more and more surely that it was here, to Berlin, that he had come in his fear and despair. Here he could escape British law by selling himself to the other side.'

But I knew my Paul. He would be irresolute until the last minute. Until his money ran out he would stay here in West Berlin, trying to forget in women and drink, until the morning when he woke penniless and knew there was no more waiting and no turning back. And it was before he reached that low point of desperation that we must rescue him.

I said as much to Lydia when, later, we sat on a café terrace for a drink.

"If he's in Berlin," she said helplessly, "wherever do we start looking? You know your Colonel warned you that Paul *must* be found quickly—before news gets to the papers."

I fell silent and thought of how Paul would spend the last few days of freedom remaining to him; and then I said, "We must make the rounds of all the Berlin night spots where Paul would go for a good time. The lot. And we must start now. It's our only hope for a lead. I'll get some addresses from the waiter."

She laid a hand on my arm. "And my parents? Their last address isn't far into the Eastern Zone. Any taxi could take you there in a few minutes. You could get them out so easily, Hugh—though I suppose we'd never get them a visa to enter England."

"Yes, we will. But that makes it even more important for me to trace Paul first. I must do all that I can for him. I'll offer the Colonel the truth about where Paul is, in return for help for your parents. Don't you see—that's my bargaining counter. He can't refuse!"

I did not give her time to argue, but summoned the waiter, and got from him a leering list of the sort of night spots Paul would be likely to favour. And then we set off.

Since we had grown up, I never had shared my brother's idea of a good time; and the nightclub round was more tiring than the trudge along the road from the wrecked car. Early on we found that my contact-place, the Maüse Turm, did not open till nine, so we left that till last.

We followed the same routine in each place: a drink, a dance on the tiny floor—and all the time our eyes searching the smoky room for a glimpse of Paul. And then, a little more tired, on to the next.

The Red Mill . . . Joe's . . . the Melodie . . . the trail dragged on. Stuffy rooms crammed with people talking too loudly with forced gaiety; blaring bands, mostly just off pitch; frozen nudes and tatty stripteases.

Five . . . six . . . seven. All the same, and nowhere any luck. I had got to the stage where names did not matter, and I was beginning to realise what we were attempting: to find one man in a city of three and a half million people.

It was nearly eleven now and, though I had only been drinking beer, seven in a row were starting to weary me. "Let's try one more," I said, gulping at the fresh air as we stood outside, on the

steps, " then go to the Maüse Turm. Do the rest tomorrow."

The next on my list was the Sombrero. I remember the neon light over the door, the narrow entrance and, beyond it, the writhing mass of figures on the dance floor, the haze of cigarette smoke, the beat of accordion, drums, and piano.

I had just taken my last breath of fresh air before plunging in when a hand came out from beside me, pushing me gently but firmly in the chest.

" No, sir."

The owner of the hand appeared from an alcove. He was a short man with the pallid face and bagged eyes of those who work by night and fail to sleep by day. He must have been the manager.

" What do you mean, " No, sir '? "

" Sorry—you can't come in." The English was near-perfect, but with a phoney American twang.

" Why not? "

" You know quite well, sir. We are glad to see our foreign visitors at any time—provided that they do not make scenes and provided that they pay their bills for drinks and the damage they cause. When you have settled your account, we shall be delighted to welcome you again."

Lydia was just behind me, and her fingers bit into my arm. No need for her to speak. I knew.

This man thought he was talking to Paul. © Christopher Landon 1960

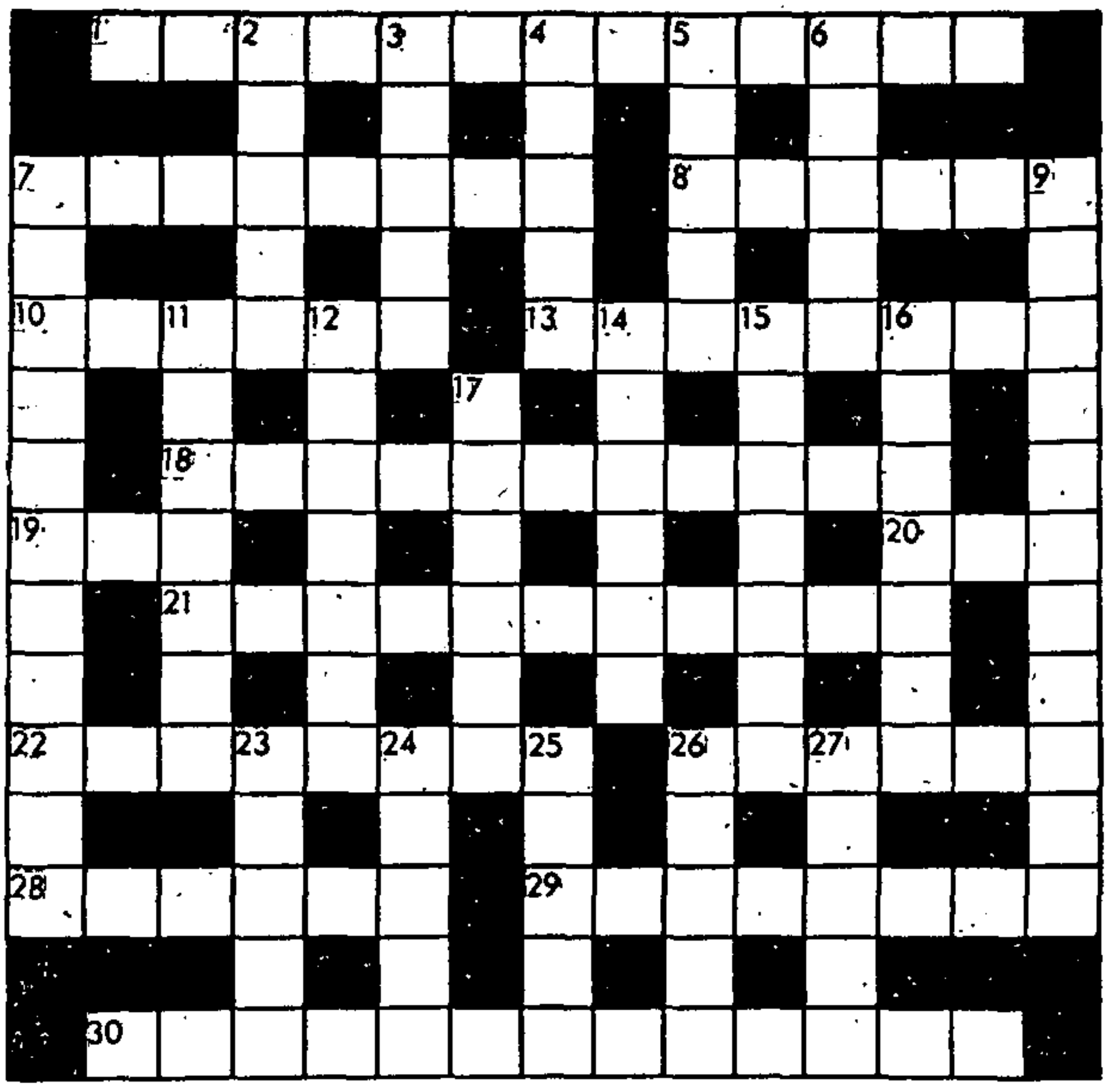
★ *The last part of The Mirror Room appears in next month's Argosy*

ARGOSY CROSS-WORD

★

Solution on Page 111

★



CLUES

Across

1 They're recovering, with lowland perfumes (13).

7 Rubbish, but there's meaning in it (8).

8 Animals on four legs or two ? (6).

10 Shy holding two pounds and a penny, frigidly (6).

13 Sounds like era of sewers (8).

18 United Nations war proclaimed unjustified (11).

19 Male issue (3).

20 The devil's in the chimpanzee (3).

21 Ship in which many read nothing (11).

22 Wild treaders stopped short (8).

26 Doctor and backward Tory decay (3-3).

28 Eastern M.P.'s rage at such government ? (6).

29 Told how he ran back, reproved ? (8).

30 These girls go out with crooks (13).

Down

2 Pried in piano sedulously (5).

3 Vex, in any number (5).

4 Correct and come to an end (5).

5 A vulgar beast, Chesterton said (5).

6 Sheer necessity when stocking up ? (5).

7 I see ten cats to make needful (11).

9 21 across is certain to be this (5-6).

11 The French and German in wash (7).

12 Illegal chap in " The Black Arrow " (7).

14 This sanity to a tenor is crime (6).

15 I, regent in the whole number (7).

16 Listener could check the books as well (7).

17 Game may take you over the chasm (6).

23 Top people, as it were (5).

24 Employed by 25 down ? (5).

25 Eater and his French repast (5).

26 Sad song from Red G.I. (5).

27 " A few more — shall roll " (Bonar) (5).

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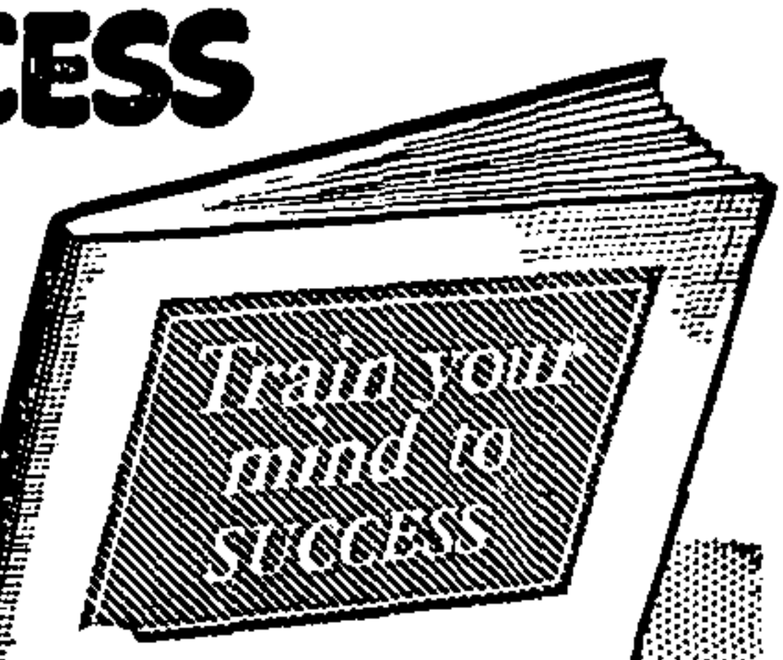

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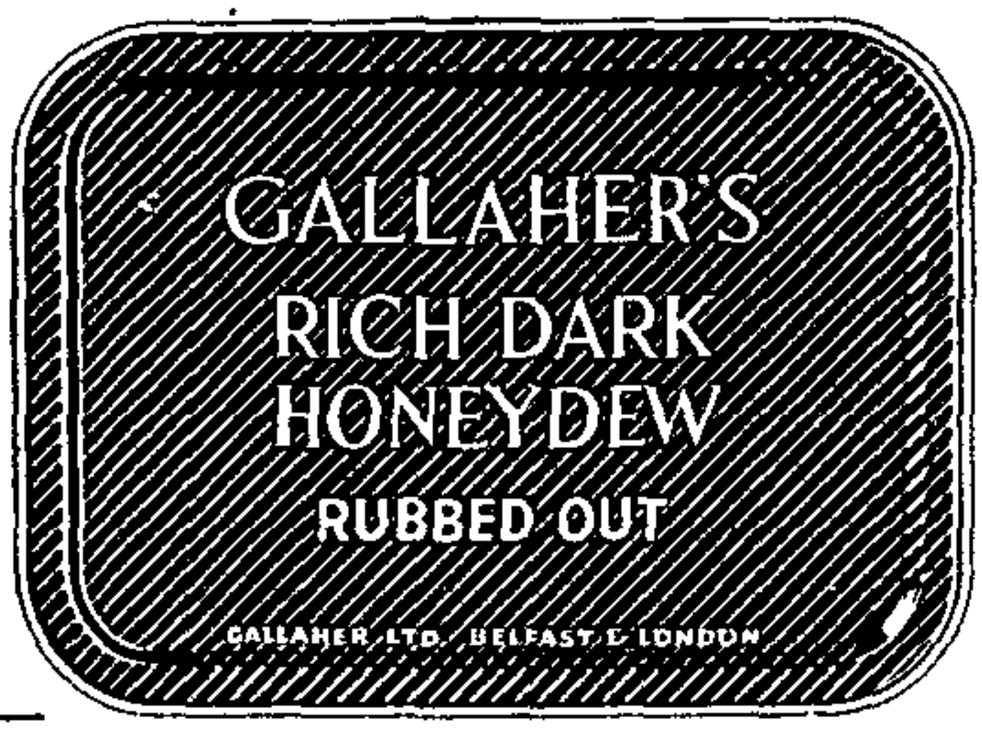
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